

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



101 419

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

92 F283

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



Public Library

Kansas City, Mo.



3 1148 00776 3162

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY: THEATRE.



W. G. FAY, a Self Portrait

THE FAYS
of the Abbey Theatre

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

BY

W. G. FAY & CATHERINE CARSWELL

WITH A FOREWORD BY

JAMES BRIDIE

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1935, BY
HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, INC.

*All rights reserved, including
the right to reproduce this book
or portions thereof in any form.*

first edition

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE POLYGRAPHIC COMPANY OF AMERICA, NEW YORK

0c 28

“ nothing extenuate
Nor set down aught in malice.”

TO
“ HERSELF ”—BRIGIT

FOREWORD

I HAVE not yet read this book. It is impossible, therefore, to recommend it further than to say this : That when I do read it, the first dull page I encounter will give me the surprise of my life. Mrs. Carswell and Mr. Fay may be capable of many things, but not of dullness. Further, that this is a very clever kind of collaboration to think of and that I thought of it first. Anybody can write an autobiography and it is difficult to write one that is not interesting in parts; but the reader has to select and make allowances and take passages with a grain of salt and perhaps even despise the writer before he can get his full money's worth out of the book. This is another way of saying that not one in ten thousand books of reminiscence is a work of art.

"Very well, then," I said to Billy Fay, "you are an artist who has spent most of his working life at a composite art, speaking other people's words on the stage and making them live. Why not let an artist in these things take your words and acts and make them live on the printed page?" This is not an Aloysius Horn business, mark you. Fay wrote it on his own typewriter and Mrs. Carswell took the plastic material and made it take shape. It is likely that she has given the adventures and sincerities and oddities of the book their just oppositions and emphases. When we begin to confess, the neatest introspectors among us are apt to be a little gauche.

So you are going to have, I hope, an example of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

a new way of writing history through the medium of a very interesting personality who helped to make that history. It is not necessary at this date to appraise the position of the Abbey Theatre in the history of the Stage. It initiated a new kind of playhouse, a new kind of play and a new kind of acting. The part played in this feat by the Fays has, perhaps, been insufficiently emphasised in the text-books. Many more assertive or spectacular personalities than theirs were mixed up in the venture. In this version of a very Irish pageant it may emerge that they had their importance. Of one of the brothers it may certainly be said that it is easy not to notice him if you look round with too careless a regard.

Some years ago a number of us sat round a leather-topped table discussing the bleak future of the Scottish National Theatre Society. We were going through a heap of letters offering the services of the brilliant young and the experienced old in the office of Producer to the Society. Somebody said, "What about Fay?"

It was as if the L.M.S. in search of a managing director had suddenly heard the name of George Stephenson. The Abbey was our ideal, our star. It seemed to us to have been there since the beginning of time. It was incredible that one of its founders should still be alive and practising his art and kicking against the pricks. We found that such was the case and that we could just afford his fee. So it happened that John Brandane and I walked a rainy Sauchiehall Street with the impresario of Synge, Yeats, Russell and Lady Gregory. He was a wizened little man in a

FOREWORD

soaking mackintosh and insecure-looking pince-nez. A wet cigarette hung from his expressive lower lip. We showed him the theatre where the Glasgow Repertory used to be. It is now the property of the Young Men's Christian Association. He looked dismally at the asbestos box which had been erected on the stage to prevent fire and the rapid change of scenery. "The Lord look sideways on them," he said. As cheerfully as an Old Contemptible moving up to the attack on Passchendaele Ridge he agreed to undertake our melancholy task. We felt ashamed of intruding on his sorrows; but later he went to tea at the Brandanes' and made them laugh till they were ill.

He was installed in Glasgow, to which he brought some books on theosophy, some engraving tools, the mask of the girl who was drowned smiling and a stout heart and a merry one, for all his mournful face. He gave us a string of lovely productions and almost persuaded the local wealthy to give us a theatre of our own. He had awe-inspiring bursts of eloquence and he clearly knew what he was talking about and meant what he said. But the Scots are funny. . . .

Well, I am not, thank God, writing a book about Mr. Fay; but there is one more thing to be said. The theatrical profession is, in many ways, a preposterous one. It is subject to mass and individual hysteria. It is often shiftless, often improvident, often plumb mad. But in no profession are there so many seniors who are prepared selflessly to devote their time and energy to helping a tyro with the least glimmering of promise. They neither expect nor get any adequate sort of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

reward in this world and won't, I suppose, till they take turns at conducting the Choir of the Morning Stars. They are seldom thanked. Hundreds of good actors and thousands of people to whom they have given pleasure owe a debt to Mr. Fay. One playwright at least would like to acknowledge that he is conscious of his debt.

JAMES BRIDIE.

Glasgow, March 1935.

POSTSCRIPT

By CATHERINE CARSWELL

WHEN this book gets into print, Mr. Fay and I are going to send a presentation copy jointly to Mr. Bridie in kind acknowledgment of his having brought us together on the job. Whether he will read it is not so easily known. He is not only a busy man, but a godlike one, combining in himself the functions of the dramatist and the healer and therefore moving in a doubly mysterious way. Having begun by writing an introduction to a book that he had not read, he went on—by what process of insight mere mortals cannot guess—to recommend to the author that it ought to be rewritten by a specific hand, namely mine. This being accomplished, he obligingly wrote a new introduction to the rewritten but still, by him, unread book. One thing alone is clear: he will never be able to compare Mr. Fay's draft with mine, and I think his best procedure will be to put this volume reverently unopened on the shelf he reserves for his own works. Then, each time he looks at its spine, he will be able to congratulate himself on his neat piece of surgery in transplanting one of Mr. Fay's ribs in such a way that it might be clothed with the flesh that publishers require.

For my part it gives me special satisfaction to put my name beside that of the original author's on the title-page, even if I should never discover by what chain of circumstances I was enabled to do so. While

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

still callow, though old enough not to be, I found myself dramatic critic of *The Glasgow Herald* and a standing example of the triumph of enthusiasm over ignorance. Not that ignorance was without its victories. Mr. Fay, in one of our conversations, has told me that one of my mistakes—happily a very little one—occurred in my notice of the first visit of the Irish Players to Glasgow, although, again happily, I had nothing but appreciation for what they gave us. But the depth of my inexperience was mercifully hidden from me until I came to read the script of Mr. Fay's book. Then I knew. And I wondered how anybody, knowing less than he did about the theatre, could have the temerity to set up as a dramatic critic. Now, informed as I am, I should know that if a performance appeared to fall short of perfection it would be by one of those circumstances for which neither actors nor producers are conceivably to blame. I am therefore doubtful whether I ought to recommend *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre* to dramatic critics any more than to Mr. Bridie himself. But I know that every actor, amateur or professional, in the kingdom, every producer and manager, will be the better for reading what so closely concerns him. Nor is this all. In another of our conversations Mr. Fay said, "Life is in the living of it," and that saying is the philosophy of his book, which is not merely a record of the theatre by one of its most distinguished makers, but the picture of a gay toiler who thought no labour too great or too humble for the calling he had chosen simply because he loved it.

CONTENTS

PART I

BEFORE	PAGE I
------------------	-----------

PART II

THE ABBEY	103
---------------------	-----

PART III

AFTER	233
LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS, WITH CASTS	298

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING PAGE

W. G. FAY (A Self Portrait)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
FRANK FAY	32
"W. G. F." RAMPANT (Laurie Carton)	60
THE ABBEY THEATRE (D. W. Fay)	106
W. B. YEATS	118
W. G. FAY (The Tramp in "In the Shadow of the Glen")	140
FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "HYACINTH HALVEY" AT THE ABBAY THEATRE, 1906	164
SCENE FROM "SPREADING THE NEWS"	172
MISS SARA ALLGOOD	178
ARTHUR SINCLAIR	184
MRS. W. G. FAY	210
J. M. SYNGE (J. B. Yeats)	222
SCENE FROM ACT III "JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND," BY BERNARD SHAW (Coronation performance at 10 Downing St.)	260
MAIRE O'NEILL AS AUNT ELLEN IN "WHITE-HEADED BOY"	266
PRODUCING "THE SILVER BOX," BIRMINGHAM REPER- TORY THEATRE	288

PART I
BEFORE

CHAPTER I

NONE of my family on either side had any connexion with the arts except a maternal uncle who, in an evil moment, much against the wishes of his relatives, became an engraver. It was looked upon as a frivolous method of earning one's bread, not sounding enough like work. This uncle of mine, I may say in passing, went off to Birmingham and started to do jeweller's enamel work, which was then a new invention and special to that city, and afterwards he went to New York. When I first went there myself with my Irish Players a long time later, I made a point of looking up the scapegrace, but all I could tell you about him now is that he was working for Tiffany's, which meant that he had climbed to the top of his particular tree. Also he went every day to Sing Sing Prison to chat with the prisoners, write letters for them and cheer them up a bit. I couldn't tell you now what he looked like.

But, as I said before, Uncle Frank was one of the sports that you can't keep out of a long family, no matter how god-fearing and well-doing, and I don't know of any others at all till I come to myself and my brother Frank, as I will presently, and Frank comes first always.

The Dowlings, strong farmers from the Midlands on the one side, were my mother's people; the O'Fahys, tailor bodies from Galway, my father's. Farmer Dowling's son, my mother's father, was disinherited for becoming a Roman Catholic, so he came up to

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Dublin, where he was first a basket-maker and afterwards an ironmonger. He opened a small shop in Kevin Street, to which he later got a post-office attached, and in time he managed, by working very hard, to buy a fair lot of house property in the neighbourhood. He worked, too, for the local charities as well as teaching Sunday School at the Catholic Church in Francis Street. Grandfather O'Fahy left his home in Tuam to carry on his tailoring business in the metropolis, and, reaching there during the "No Irish Need Apply" period, he was shrewd enough to change O'Fahy to the English "Fay." Both my grandparents were Gaelic-speaking, and to them English was a foreign though an exact tongue. My O'Fahy grandfather I never set eyes on, but Grandfather Dowling often shared his supper porridge with me, each of us taking a spoonful until the big mug was empty, while he told me stories. Nearly all his stories began, "Be the powders of war I remember;" and I remember he used to say, "There's roguery in all trades, me boy, but in the basket-maker's."

My father, when he grew up, became a teacher in the Model School in Marlborough Street. By this time O'Connell had forced the Catholic Emancipation Act through Parliament, making it possible for Catholics to enter the Civil Service, and a certain number of the Marlborough Street teachers were allowed to sit each year as candidates for Government posts in Ireland. My father passed his examination with little trouble. He was appointed to the Education Office in Marlborough Street and worked there for

BEFORE

over forty years, most of the time in the one room. To all boys that were ambitious this was put forward as an ideal state of life. Allowing that it was very hard for you to get into the Civil Service, it was still harder to get you out, and the longer you lived the larger salary you got. Thus it came naturally that as we boys left school, whether we were that way ambitious or not, we were expected to Follow in Father's Footsteps. It couldn't be thought that any boy would question the beauty of making himself financially safe for life.

All the same, Frank, my eldest brother, dodged it, though it cost him a bit of trouble. Starting to learn shorthand and typewriting when he was still in school, he became expert at both, and when he left school he got the post of secretary to the director of one of the largest firms of accountants in Dublin. Steadily scorning the security of a Government job, he only gave up his secretaryship to become a professional actor. His employer was disgusted with him. But never mind. Frank was the first of the Irish Players.

To-day, after giving much thought to the matter, I cannot make my mind up what was the real reason that induced me also to try and make a livelihood in the most precarious of all the arts. It may have been due to the fact that acting always seemed the most natural thing for me to do. Whether I did it well or ill it was always easy for me to impersonate other people. But, of course, Frank's influence counted, and if it hadn't been for Frank I daresay my acting would never have got beyond the back drawing-room stage.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

When it came to the time when I ought to be leaving the model school where I was, it was decided that I was to have a year or two at the Jesuit College. This was the same college to which James Joyce a little later went, and he has described it with accuracy in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Conal O'Riordan went there too, and has described it in *Adam of Dublin*. In my case the place was chosen to put a finish on me. It did, but not the kind that was expected.

At that time nearly all the secondary schools in Ireland devoted their teaching mainly to getting as many boys as possible to pass the different grades of the so-called Intermediate Examinations. These were an educational test between school and university entrance examinations. The type of boy these schools were most keen on getting was the good "swot," who would show up well in the "honours list," earning high capitation grants as well as credit for his school. Unfortunately I was not that kind of lad. I could learn a lesson at home perfectly, if my brother Harry would help me with it, and the next morning, when the teacher demanded it in class, not remember a line. Just to hear him say "Now, Fay" produced in me a cataleptic condition that only disappeared after a severe application of the "ferula" to the palms of my hands, and not always then. The ferula was a piece of leather about eighteen inches long and half an inch thick, made, we believed, from a portion of a horse's harness. As a general rule my allowance of beatings was forty a day, but in a short while my

BEFORE

hands became so calloused that it did not matter very much to me how many I got. I could remember the plot and every detail of any penny-dreadful I read (and many and various they were), but not the names and dates of the Kings of England—or of Ireland for the matter of that. The masters, both cleric and lay, did their best with me, but I was an outsize in ignorance. It wasn't that I did not want to learn, it was just that I could not. What I wanted to know I have always found out about, no matter what it cost me in time or trouble, but the subjects that formed the school curriculum did not interest me, nor did I see what use, having learned them, I should ever make of them. If I was to remain in the school I must pass the Intermediate Examinations. The teachers did their best to drag me up to this standard, but I was beyond them. In the end, giving me up as hopeless, they let me make a class for myself alone. Here, to my great satisfaction, I spent my days making full-size drawings of nuts, bolts, and screws with the idea of one day becoming a draughtsman. I never became a draughtsman, but that practice in drawing helped me greatly when, later in life, I had not only to design scenery, but also to make the stage on which it was to be seen. It came in well, too, when I had to be my own "clerk of works" while the Abbey Theatre was being built out of an old music-hall and a disused morgue.

The time of the year that I liked best was from the end of June until September. This was the holiday period that followed the examinations, for Irish schools closed a month before English ones. There was a

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

glorious break for nearly ten weeks. I went for long walks, right across the town from Rathmines up the North Circular Road into the Phoenix Park, then along the canal banks to the bridge at Rathmines again, and home tired and hungry in the late afternoon. There were long days, too, spent exploring the Dublin mountains, out through Dundrum and on to the Scalp, or, taking Rathfarnham as a starting-point, up through Glen Dhu and on to Glen Cullen and home over the Three Rock Mountain.

Some days I took to the sea-coast and walked from Sandymount to Kingstown and, if I was not too tired, on to Dalkey and Killiney, or, on the north side, by Dollymount on the road to Howth. I always started soon after breakfast, with some slices of bread and butter and a sup of milk in a bottle with which to cajole the pangs of hunger until six in the evening, when it was wise to be home, as this was the hour for the family dinner. When I had the money to hire a bicycle I went on long journeys with my chum, who was the proud owner of a tricycle with a very large wheel on one side balanced by two very small ones on the other. My first mount was one of the 48-inch bicycles known as "penny-farthings." The saddle was set behind the forks that carried the big wheel, and there was a step on the tubing over the little wheel to stand on while you scrambled up into it. If you mounted too impetuously the little wheel went up in the air, and you went head-first over the big wheel and scraped all the skin off your nose as you landed still more impetuously on the ground. But the "high

BEFORE

bicycle" allowed you to have a great view of the country as you rode along, so long, that is, as there was no wind blowing abeam. If there was a wind, you were kept too busy to notice the beauties of the landscape. The first "safety" I rode had no frame. Its two wheels were held together by a single tube brazed into the forks of both wheels. One day as I came down the mountains by Stillorgan at top speed to escape an approaching thunderstorm this tube broke in the middle and the front wheel made record time downhill, while the other one ran up my back as I landed on the road. It was a long walk home in the rain carrying the two wheels instead of being carried by them.

By the time I left school I had a very good knowledge of the south side of Dublin as far as Greystones, and northward as far as Skerries. I had a fund of miscellaneous information picked up from casual meetings with tramps, tinkers and other wanderers on the roads of the world. Days spent on the quays or the Ringsend basin enabled me to get news of the sea from the mates of the schooners that voyaged up and down the coast to Belfast or Cork, or from able seamen, who knitted while they waited for a cargo of timber from Norway to be pushed into the water through the square opening in the bow of a great four-masted windjammer or maybe a four-masted barque with corn from the Argentine. I think it was only my defective eyesight that prevented me from going to sea.

CHAPTER II

THE school had a little theatre attached to it, and one of the great events of the year was the production of a play. It was an exciting time for everybody, but only those boys who held a prominent place in their forms—or, I might add, in Dublin society—had a chance of being in it. If you were a barrister's son you were sure of a part.

As in Shakespeare's time, all the female parts had to be played by boys, and the sight of a useful half-back or a crack bowler from the first eleven strolling about the stage with a head of golden curls and a skirt gave an added hilarity to the occasion. I, of course, was never high enough in form or society to be invited to take a part, and I'm sure if I had been, I should have been much too frightened to accept it. Perhaps this is one reason why it seemed to me a waste of time, even if your relatives did turn up at the show—as mine would not have done anyway—to be told how marvellous you were as Juliet or Lady Macbeth.

My brother Frank had begun to take a serious interest in the theatre some time before I left school. He used an old wardrobe in our bedroom to store the second-hand copies of plays that he bought for a few coppers off the book barrows that lined one side of the quay near O'Connell Bridge. I have wondered many times since where these beautiful calf-bound volumes came from originally and who had sold them into the degradation in which Frank found them. They were nearly all printed and published in Dublin,

BEFORE

tooled in gold and with an engraving of some famous actor, or a scene from the play, on the frontispiece. I suppose at one time these volumes would have a good sale among those who attended the performances at the flourishing old Dublin theatres in Smock Alley and Crow Street in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

I read everything I could lay my hands on, and Frank's plays were a welcome change when the last edition of *The Boys of London and New York* was not up to standard, or if I didn't want to read yet once more *Spring-heeled Jack, the Terror of London*—not to mention *Nickel-plate Ned, the Terror of the Prairies*. Before I was eighteen I had read quite a lot of plays—Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Dekker, and Restoration comedies by Dryden, Congreve, and Wycherley—without the least idea that they were of any great importance either as drama or literature. I had never read any literary criticism, and at that time plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had no interest for those connected with the theatre. It was the London Stage Society that was to revive the public interest in them as practical theatre stuff.

By degrees Frank nearly filled the old wardrobe with his library of drama, and before going to bed he would take a last browse over some favourite author by the light of a candle stuck to one of the shelves by a few drops of its own grease. This secrecy had to be observed, but I always expected to see the whole lot go up in flames some night when he would be too engrossed in reading to notice the scorching of the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

shelf under which the candle stood. The room in which we slept was called a "return room." Although it stood about twenty-five feet from the yard below, Frank always felt that unless the snib was on the window we were in danger of attack from burglars. I pointed out that to reach us they would need a twenty-foot ladder, and then the only thing they could steal was his library of second-hand plays, but this made no difference to Frank's fears.

I am inclined to think that those editions of plays and our talks about them were in a great measure responsible for awakening in me a desire to know more about the theatre. There was a cousin of mine several times removed—he was a nephew of my mother's stepmother, if that is any kind of a relation—called James McCormack, and I felt that he could give me all the information I wanted. When he was not selling timber, which was how he earned his living, all his spare time was devoted to the theatre. He not only acted, but he had written several one-act plays and sketches. Sometimes he helped the professionals at the Queen's Theatre by playing small parts for them. His favourite parts were "heavies" like Simon Legree and Salem Scudder—"I bid ten thousand dollars for the octoroon." In a Christy Minstrel show he was an expert "Corner Man," playing the "bones" with great skill. He could sing a comic song, or dance a step dance at need. I brought the wrath of the household on my head by chanting excerpts from one of his songs called "The Cruise of the Calabar." It went something like this :

BEFORE

The *Calabar* was a clipper flat,
Copper-bottomed fore and aft,
Her rudder it stuck out away behind
And her wheel was a great big shaft.
And with half a gale to swell her sail
She made three knots an hour,
Being the fastest craft on the whole canal
Though only the one horse-power.

Her Captain he was a strapping youth,
His height was four foot two,
His eyes was black and his nose was red
And his cheeks were a Prussian blue.
He wore a leather medal that he won in the Crimea war,
And his wife she was pilot and passenger's cook
On board of the *Calabar*.

And so on for a dozen verses or more. It was forthwith forbidden as a vulgar street song. Neither slang nor vulgarity was allowed in our home. Another favourite song of mine was entitled the "Corner Boy."

What does your mother say, Johnnie me lad?
Has she been roundin' upon your ould dad?
Slip in an' see if she's vexed with me
And I'll wait for ye just round the corner.

I once was a rattlin' fine man for me size,
Me cheeks white an red like the roses,
But the hardest of words, yes, and much harder blows
Has made crooked the straightest of noses.

-Or Jimmie Masterson's great song :

May the gurnets in the Liffey
Swally up the ould Turk
For leavin' me so lonely,
Poor Mary Ann McGurk.

There were plenty of song-writers in Dublin and plenty of good comedians to sing their songs. Later

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

on one of our Irish Players, J. M. Kerrigan, made a wonderful collection of street songs and ballads. I hope this still exists, and that some of them, at least, have been or will be printed for the joy of future generations.

At James McCormack's house anyone who was interested in "the Boards," as he liked to call it, was made welcome. It was over his parlour fire, when the children were in bed and his wife was trying to overtake the huge family mending, that he told me, with illustrations, the story of his triumphs. He had made an astonishingly varied collection of wigs and costumes by means of which he demonstrated each achievement in his narration. And James was generous. He presented me with a gorgeous suit. It was made of bathing-tent calico, red and white striped—fine upstanding stuff—with buttons two inches across and tails that came down to my never very distant heels. And he threw in with this a black horsehair wig. In secrecy I wore these things, strutting my little hour on the boards of my bedroom to my profound satisfaction. To have been caught doing so would have been serious. I might have been turned out from under the paternal roof, and I knew it. Never shall I forget the prickly joys of that suit and that wig.

The arrival in Dublin of the famous "thought-reader," Irving Bishop, caused a tremendous sensation in the city. He professed to be able to find any hidden article, no matter where, if he was allowed to hold one end of a piano wire, the other end of which was grasped by someone that knew the location of the

BEFORE

concealed object, which was generally a pin. The result of his visit was that "pin-finding" became a popular indoor sport. Everybody in Dublin began trying to find hidden pins. With a little practice and with the help of my chum, John Kelly, to hold my hand for the first few experiments, I became a champion "pin-finder." I discovered, in fact, that I could quite easily find any hidden object so long as I could hold the hand of someone that knew where it was. As the result of this brilliant accomplishment John and I became very popular as an inexpensive addition to the success of any party. My most historic achievement was at our church at a beanfeast given by the Bishop, when I found a pin stuck into an apple tree in his great long garden.

The fame thus gained encouraged us to try our hand at something more ambitious. This was the opening of "*The Theatre Royal Back Drawing-room At Home*, with an Entertainment of Songs, Recitations and Exhibitions of 'Pin-Finding.'" After a show or two Frank was drawn into the venture. He contributed some recitations and suggested that we ought to produce a play. John and I were very doubtful of our ability even to act the smallest parts in a play, but Frank's knowledge of the theatre—he had long been a faithful galleryite—gave us confidence and we began rehearsals. Our chosen play was an old farce called *Turn Him Out*, recommended to us by James McCormack, who had often himself played the part of the "windmill man." As soon as we began rehearsing we discovered that if we wanted to produce plays we

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

must have scenery. The idea of using curtains instead did not please us at all. If the real theatre had scenery, then so must "The Theatre Royal," but how to get any was the difficulty. The joint incomes of John and myself were about two shillings a week. Never mind; by miraculous economy we managed to buy enough holland to make a back-cloth.

I began my first experiment in scene-painting by borrowing from the local library the only book that, so far as I knew, had ever been published on the subject. By the time I had done with it there was nothing in that book that I hadn't at my finger ends. A yielding aunt was persuaded to sew the lengths of holland together until it was the right size for the scene. Then I stealthily attached it to the wall of the little room where I was supposed to spend my time studying for the Civil Service. Having got some useful tips from my cousin about the vagaries of distemper painting, I mixed a bucket of whiting and primed the canvas with it. But most of the whiting went on the floor, and much of my time and energy in mopping it up. When the priming was dry I carefully laid on the colours, copying with all the faithfulness of which I was master an illustration of a landscape from my book of directions. At least I had that much help in a virgin undertaking.

Never before had I held a paint-brush in my hand, and little had I suspected the capacity of such an implement for depositing material everywhere but in the place where it is wanted. It did not occur to me that, holland being a very porous material, paint would

BEFORE

go right through it so that the wall behind it should be decorated with a unique design. When at last I got the scene finished, however, it looked a lot better than I had expected; a result due, I think, to the slavishness with which I had stuck to the printed directions instead of giving my original but untaught genius full scope.

Frank and I, feeling not so bad, took down the scene off the wall. But how did we feel then? The wall behind my masterpiece was truly a dreadful sight. The only way to mend matters was to repaper, with all possible speed, the whole of that room and to trust to luck that its condition would not be discovered before we had done.

Great and prolonged diplomacy was needed to get leave to turn the back drawing-room into a stage. It meant disturbing the furniture and getting more chairs into the front room. Carpets had to be taken up and pictures down. A wooden frame had to be put up to carry the scenery, and a row of candles with tin shades behind them was stood on the floor to act as footlights. The folding doors between the two rooms were held open, one by each of my two sisters during the play, and closed when it finished.

In spite of pains, pride and prejudice, the first performance given to our relatives and their friends was a great success, so much so that in a few months' time we had another play ready. For this occasion we chose that evergreen farce, *Box and Cox*. But this finished our theatrical productions at home. The word had gone forth from headquarters that the lease

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

of the "Theatre Royal Back Drawing-room" was to be determined. Too much scene painting, too much noise and cheering late at night, and finally and more serious than the other offences, too much dislocation of domestic routine, drove the budding company forth to seek, in other houses, what chances there might be for the display of their histrionic ability. We called ourselves from the name of the road in which we lived, "The Ormond Dramatic Company." Out of us came the actors that formed first the "Irish National Theatre Society" and later the "Irish Players." For quite a long time our principal comedian was obliged to appear on play-bills as W. G. Ormond, thus not besmirching the family name by his dreadful performances of unmentionable plays in unheard-of places.

My first appearance before the public "on any stage," as the old play-bills used to say, took place in a small theatre attached to Portobello Barracks in Rathmines. The officers and men occasionally organised plays or concerts here for the regimental charities, and it was at one of the concerts that John Kelly and I made our début in a cross-talk scene modelled on the work of the "Two Macs," who were very popular at the time. The dialogue was the result of the combined efforts of James McCormack and ourselves, and it went very well considering our inexperience, especially as we followed it up with a burlesque boxing match. Soldiers make a useful audience, as I was to learn again when, many years later, I had to produce plays during the Great War for

BEFORE

fourteen camp theatres. They go to a show determined to enjoy it, and if they cannot laugh with you they do the other thing, laugh at you. If you can gain the sympathy of an audience of soldiers, then you can face ordinary audiences in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester and even Sheffield, with confidence.

These sporadic performances were combined with an intensive study of the drama from the sixpenny gallery of the Gaiety Theatre, with an occasional visit to the shilling pit at the Queen's. We managed to get to one or the other at least once a week, except during a week when there was a special "star" actor, when, by hook or crook, we managed three or even four nights. We saw Herbert Tree (I little thinking that I should ever play with him), Osmond and Edmund Tearle, Lewis Waller and Fred Terry. We were lost in admiration of that great combination, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal. I should think that Mrs. Kendal, just then, was the most finished actress on the English stage. There was Frank Benson too, with Rodney and a company that all became stars in later years. But our prime favourites were Edward Compton and his charming wife, Virginia Bateman, whose performance of Lady Teazle I have never seen bettered.

When the "stars" came we never missed a performance, no matter how difficult it might be to find the necessary sixpence; and here I must mention my mother. When it happened that our pockets were in a perfectly desperate condition she could always be relied on to produce a shilling for us from some-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

where or other. I may as well explain our financial position at this point. A plutocrat like Frank, who earned solid coin of the realm each week, was entitled to deduct therefrom sundry shillings for "expenses." But the only resource that John, my theatre-loving friend, and I had was the chance of earning a little pocket-money by copying legal documents for his father, who was managing clerk for a very busy firm of solicitors. The typewriter was unknown to the law in those days—indeed there were only two machines in all Dublin—so every document had still to be copied in manuscript and the staff of any solicitor could earn extra money by scrivenery. There was always plenty of home work, and many weary hours we spent copying deeds and indentures to get the wherewithal to see our favourites. Those were good days for the theatre, for, except concerts, it was the only kind of entertainment that "respectable" people could patronise. The cinematograph was yet to be and the "Music Hall" was out of bounds. The two we had in Dublin were in back streets, like the public-houses in Belfast, so that one could slip in without causing any undue attention from those whose sole occupation was minding their neighbours' business.

The Dublin Music Hall that was best known belonged to Dan Lowry, and was situated in a court off Dame Street. Here, together with many others of the lost and lapsed, we spent many pleasant evenings, careless of our condition and, of course, unknown to our parents, listening to Tom Costello singing

BEFORE

“The Miner’s Dream of Home,” or rejoicing in the great J. W. Ashcroft in song and dance. The “Brick Came Down,” “We Had a Half a Day” or the song about “Moving”:

McGovern carried the crockery-ware,
The cradle was handed to me;
Murphy he sat on top of the cart
Holdin’ the clock on his knee.
The horse started off with a funeral trot,
Staggerin’ under his load;
He had much stayin’ powers,
But it took us two hours
To travel a mile of the road.

This was always followed by his acrobatic step dance. The ladies and the serio-comic in large hats with feathers, tunic, trunks, and tights were always with us. But Vesta Tilley came, great little artist in all she ever did, and Lottie Collins in “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,” and Vesta Victoria singing

Down at the gate
I’ll meet my darling Kate.

Ah yes, and darling Marie Lloyd in “She Sits among the Cabbages,” and Harriet Vernon in

She only answered Ting-a-ling-a-ling
To all that I could say.

Not to speak of Little Tich, the White-eyed Kaffir, and a whole gifted host of others.

The “star turn” was at 9 p.m. every night, and if ever you had been unlucky during the day in finding a man at his office, it was ten to one you could catch him at the bar in “Dan’s” when that turn was over. There, mellowed by music-hall song and the wine of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

the country, both parties could conduct subtle negotiations about the sale of horses, timber, or hay to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The other "Haunt of Harmony" was in the "palace" of that famous Irish comedian, Pat Kinsella, actor and singer of great ability. His particular song, "Here's luck to me battered ould corkscrew," was sung far and wide. Pat reigned in a court off Grafton Street, and was everybody's friend. He advertised that "Patrovski Kinsellavitch could always be found at the 'One Lamp' in Grafton Street." He kept a special bottle of cordial from which he always drank if anyone wanted to treat him. He would say to the barmaid, "Mary, Mary me dear! I'll just have a drop of that special gin the doctor ordered." His "special" came from the water tap. If it hadn't, Pat would have passed away in a year with all the friends he had that were anxious he should never suffer from drought. One of the "star" turns at this house was Jimmie Masterson, who specialised in topical ballads—"The Man-o'-War from Guinness's Brewery" or "The Cruise of the Bug-a-Boo."

Oh, from Aston Quay
The other day
A big square ship
She sailed away,
She was bound for a port
In Dublin Bay
And her cargo
It was mud !!

The captain's nose
Was as red as a carrot,
It got that way from drinkin' claret.

BEFORE

And the boys often said,
Won't you bring us a parrot
When you're comin' from foreign parts ?

There was a *rapport* between the audience and the stage that has been lost now the public are offered so many different kinds of entertainment. At that time the audience were part of the performance, so much so that I can remember a Shakespearean actor having his text corrected for him from the gallery. "You're wrong, Mr. . . . You should have said . . ." and he was given the proper line. There were no "Early Doors," or queues lined up of people waiting their turn to enter. To get into the gallery when the doors opened was a case of the best man first and the devil take the hindmost. The doors opened at 7 p.m., and if you wanted to get into the front row it was well to be leaning against the door by 6 p.m. at the latest. When it did open, if you were cute or strong enough to keep your place, you were swept up the stairs without having the trouble to walk unless your weight was over fourteen stone and you were hard to lift. There was a stout wooden barrier in front of the pay-box to prevent the rush extending too far, and you had to jam your knees hard against it while you got your ticket or you would be swept past it without one, when it was quite hopeless to try to get back until everyone else had gone in. Having breathlessly but successfully arrived down at the front row, you took off your jacket and hung it over the iron rail placed there to keep you from falling into the pit.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

The great advantage, besides visibility, possessed by the front row was that from it a raking fire of abuse could be shot at the more moneyed late-comers: "Will you sit down, you with the bald head?" or "Hurry, ma'am, I can't see the stage for your big hat." A fat man was ever liable to be asked "Who ate the dog's dinner?" Fat men were rare in Dublin those days. During the Opera season the gallery performed a select concert between the acts, the boys even going to the trouble of bringing a portable piano to accompany the different items. And heaven help anyone in another part of the theatre that dared to interrupt the music of the gods!

CHAPTER III

WITH constant visits to the theatres and music-halls, combined with such occasional shows as we could give, I began to get a knowledge of the rudiments of acting. Our repudiation by the home circle was followed by a noticeable falling off of invitations to perform in other houses. We were too much of a bother, and our scenery, which we transferred from house to house in the darkness of the night, caused dirt to be carried all over the place, damaged the walls, and created manifold disorder in well-managed households. Yet, in spite of every sort of discouragement, the Ormond Dramatic Society thrived. It felt it had a mission to perform and so refused to be wiped out. When the demand for private shows slackened, the society offered its services to various temperance societies to enable them to get funds to carry on their work; for Total Abstinence had no great popularity in Ireland, so that most of the organisations were much in need of whatever monetary help they could get. The Temperance Society attached to the church of St. Teresa in Clarendon Street was one of the first to which we offered our services. It had two large rooms close to the church, one of which was used as a stage, while the other provided seating accommodation for the audience. We could always be sure of a crowded house when we played there. They wanted money to build a large hall for concerts and lectures, and premises large enough to house the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

various activities connected with their society. I must say that anything that our performances brought them was amply repaid later when I badly needed help to carry on our own work. We visited the Father Mathew Hall in Church Street, the Town Hall, Dalkey, and, more than any other, "The Coffee Palace" in Townsend Street. This was one of the first "palaces" built to combat the "gin palace" or public-house, and was an early edition of the modern tea-shop.

It had a very nice hall, with a proper stage, proscenium, curtains and scenery. In return for our performances the Committee allowed us to use it for rehearsals if it was not otherwise engaged. Many of our plays would never have had a public performance if it had not been for this concession. The hire of a room in which to rehearse was an expense we could not afford. This need, both for some kind of a workshop and for a place in which to rehearse, is one of the big difficulties with amateurs, but it must be supplied if they are to keep in existence. It is easier to find a free rehearsal room, which can be as small as you please, than a place to make and paint scenery, which requires space. Our first lot of scenery we made and painted in an old shed at the back of my chum John's house. It had been intended only for storing garden tools, but we managed to clear enough space in which to make the small scenes designed for use in the rooms of an ordinary suburban house.

When we gave our shows in the various halls

BEFORE

round the town, however, we required very much larger and stronger frames to carry our scenery, and the scenes themselves had to be designed at least twice as large as those we had originally used. A chance meeting with a man named Black, who managed a very successful amateur operatic society, brought me the workroom I wanted. His society needed a new stock of scenery, and he promised me the use of his big club room in the day-time to work in it, in return, I would make and paint him whatever scenes he wanted for his productions.

The house the club occupied was one of those old family mansions built by the city traders when they ceased to live over their shops and built houses within walking distance of business. Like many another such, it had elaborately decorated ceilings and panelled walls, the work of craftsmen who had fled to Dublin from France at the time of the Revolution. The room that I worked in was thirty feet long by twenty wide, and sixteen feet high. One of Mr. Black's company was a clever artist, who specialised in painting illuminated addresses for presentation to members of Parliament on their election, or to Lord Mayors on the occasion of their having at last achieved the highest civic distinction. He very kindly gave me advice about composition in landscape painting, and the way to get harmony in the use of the colours. But he knew nothing about the handling of that tricky medium—distemper. Here I had to discover for myself, by trial and error, the strength of size necessary to bind the colours so that

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

they would not flake off when the canvas came to be rolled up. Among other things I taught myself to remember that wet distemper is six shades darker than it will be when it dries, and that under artificial light lemon chrome becomes white, and Prussian blue, black. Besides making and painting what scenes my benefactor wanted, I managed to make a frame-proscenium with landscape and wings to match, and a couple of interior scenes. These were for ourselves, but by hiring them to other clubs that had none of their own I earned myself a few odd pounds during the winter.

All this time I was still at school. When the time came for me to leave it was decided that, if Frank would not enter the Civil Service, then I must, and so I was sent to take special tuition from a "coach" whose business was to push you into the Service whether you liked it or not. I attended his classes for some time, but as I failed to understand about half of his lessons and was afraid to say so, and the other half, for which he used the blackboard, I couldn't see from my seat, I did not make rapid progress. I was none the less one of three thousand candidates who competed for six posts in a Preliminary Examination which was held all over the United Kingdom for the purpose of getting rid of surplus like myself. One paper I got was designed to test one's ability to decipher bad handwriting. It looked for all the world as if an inebriated hen had walked all over the paper and left the marks of her claws to be translated into the King's English. Examinees

BEFORE

were allowed twenty minutes to reduce this poultry-yard calligraphy to legibility and sense. I couldn't have done it in twenty years. I did not pass that Preliminary Examination, and I was told that as it was evident I should never be a shining light in the Civil Service I had better find myself something useful to do. I think this might have been easier if my education had finished at the Model School. The teaching there had been calculated to prepare us for the ordinary requirements of a commercial life. But my education had got badly mixed. The little I had learned at the Model School had been overlaid at the Jesuit College with a smattering of Latin and French, and scraps of chemistry and natural philosophy, and confounded by one or two limited excursions into English literature. And although these might be useful subjects if one could have followed them up, and, passing Matriculation, gone on to a University, they were the reverse of helpful in obtaining ordinary employment, which demands efficiency in any required line. It was my friend John Kelly's father who got me my first job, which made no very heavy demand. Mr. Kelly had a friend who was a chartered accountant and kept a very small office in the city for seeing his clients; but as most of his time was spent travelling through the country, auditing the books of various business houses, it was necessary to have someone in his town office to send on his letters and to answer the inquiries of intending clients if any should come. The duties were monotonous, for although there was practically no work to do, one was supposed to be

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

always on the spot in case any caller arrived—which now and again happened. It might, of course, have been worse. The device of leaving a card pinned to the door at 12 noon saying the office would be open again at 3.30 p.m. gave me time to have lunch and to digest it afterwards, and there was a salary of five shillings a week. This may not be what you, my reader, would call a large sum, but it was hard cash which helped to pay expenses. Anyway, with whatever copying work I managed to get, it was my entire income, and glad I was to get it.

I still retained a hope that I might do something with my little experience of painting, and when chance brought me into touch with the wife of the late owner of the Gaiety, Mrs. John Gunn, I managed through her influence to get an interview with the resident scenic artist. Every theatre at that time had work for at least one artist, if not for two, chiefly because they all produced each year a pantomime which was locally designed, scened and dressed, and this required continuous work in the paint room from August until December. In addition there were fairly constant renovations and novelties wanted for the stock scenery, of which each theatre had a great quantity, and there was the painting of any special scene needed by a visiting company; for in those days touring companies did not carry all their scenes, as they do to-day, but used, to a great extent, the stock scenery of the theatre, with the help of a local artist to paint them any special bits that they wanted. The Gaiety possessed one of the best

BEFORE

artists in any of the provincial theatres. His name was Anderson. As he had the habit of a melancholy tone of voice, he was generally called "Crying Anderson." As a scenic artist he was decidedly in advance of his time. His designs were broader and more brilliant in colouring than was customary. His landscapes looked like modern water-colour drawings, and his interior scenes had none of the finicking detail with which most artists then overloaded their work. He liked plenty of colour and he used it with the same skill that Charles Ricketts employed long afterwards in his production of *King Lear* at the Haymarket.

"Crying Anderson" received me in the paint room over the stage, where long benches held rows and rows of pots filled with paints of all colours, while underneath them stood further supplies in buckets and great clay jars. Two wooden frames, twenty feet by thirty, filled either side of the room with canvas stretched on them ready to receive a scene. On the one on the right he was sketching a street scene for the *Aladdin Pantomime* due the following Christmas. He had a piece of charcoal fastened to a long cane, and was covering this huge space with the same ease that I could have filled an ordinary drawing pad, six inches by nine. He was most kind and considerate to me. He asked sadly what experience I had, and told me I should have to go to an art school in the evenings if I came to work for him. At the same time he promised to apprentice me for three years for a fee of £25. I

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

thanked him and went home walking upon air. The fee was less than I had expected, and the Mecca of my dreams seemed to be at last in sight. I waited for an auspicious moment in which to lay my proposal before my father. Choosing a time when he was in the garden thinning out the chrysanthemums, in fear and trembling I imparted the news. It was no use. If I could not pass the Civil Service examinations I must find what money I needed myself. Seeing I had about as much chance of finding £25 elsewhere as I had of coming upon £500, the advent of William Fay, scenic artist, would appear to be postponed indefinitely. Frank, meanwhile, had been making progress. He was still at work, and the only exercise he ever took was his walk there and back and, once in a way, one on Sunday. Perhaps that was why I was stronger than he, but he had never been robust and, what he minded more, his voice wasn't strong. But he was convinced that the basis of all good acting was good speaking, and good speaking depended on good voice production. He determined, therefore, that he would produce a speaking voice in himself, as the great Italian masters produce the singing voice in their opera pupils. If Kean had been able to cure what seemed an habitual stutter, asked Frank, why couldn't an Irish actor make his voice, originally small, into an artistic asset? How far he succeeded, those may know who heard him speaking verse in a play by Yeats or reciting the "Chronicles" in John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*. When he was finished with himself—if ever he was—



FRANK FAY

BEFORE

he could make himself audible to the back of great theatres, like the Tyne in Newcastle, or the Coliseum in London, and not raise his voice above a whisper. At first he gave more attention to reciting than to acting, and as it was easier to find a place in a programme for a recitation than a play, he got far more practice in individual speaking and entertaining than he would if cast for a small part in a play. Recitation was a popular form of amusement at the time, and most young men could be relied on for "Kissing Cup's Race," "The Life-boat" or "Christmas Day in the Workhouse," if a party seemed to be going dull from lack of ability amongst the hosts. Several of the more promising of these young reciters later went on the stage as professional actors. One of them, after touring with Sir Frank Benson for some years, went into management for himself with his own Shakespearean Company, and I think, at this moment of writing, the "Charles Doran Shakespearean Company" is touring India.

The step from amateur to professional raises some difficult questions, especially in the art of the theatre, where every man jack of us, in Dublin anyway, started his promising career for the mere pleasure of everybody concerned. That is to say, we were amateurs all. Now, why it should be supposed that every human being is born with an innate knowledge of the stage and all connected with it is one of those things that, as Lord Dundreary said, "no fellah could understand." No one is ever suspected of being born with a knowledge of the law or of medicine,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

or, for that matter, of painting, music, plumbing or the higher mathematics. But the stage is anybody's and everybody's oyster. If any amateur actor anywhere or at any time has suffered from an inferiority complex, it was not one of our Dubliners. The modest violet was no use to them as an emblem. All they asked was to be heard and seen. Hence, the opening of the first school of acting in the town caused some searching of heart. Was there something to be learned about acting that we didn't know? Just in case there might be, when Maud Randford opened her dramatic school in Westland Row, most of us became her pupils. We soon found that she knew some things we had never thought about.

She was the wife of a well-known theatrical manager, J. W. Lacy, who had toured the small towns of Ireland for a number of years, and, getting tired of continual travelling, they tried to settle down in Dublin. In the "eighties" there were no theatres in Ireland outside of Dublin, Belfast and Cork. The small ones in Limerick and Waterford did not play for consecutive weeks, but opened only occasionally, and the rest of the country had to rely for its theatrical entertainment on travelling companies, technically called "fit-ups." These carried with them all the scenery and other "props" that they needed for their performances, and they fitted up a temporary stage or platform in any town hall, market hall, court house or other building at their disposal, in which there was seating accommodation for an

BEFORE

audience. One of these companies is still touring Ireland after forty years on the road. In those days the "fit-up" companies devoted themselves mostly to playing Irish dramas, performing again and yet again *The Colleen Bawn*, *The Shaughraun*, *Arrab-napogue*, *Green Bushes*, *Kathleen Mavourneen*, and other favourites of the same kind. It was heavy work. As a rule, the company changed town every day, for there were not many towns that had a population large enough to make a longer stay profitable; and even when they were able to put in three nights in the one place, it meant a change of programme each night of the visit.

If Miss Randford never made a great name in her business it was not because she did not know it. She knew it because she had been in every kind of play, from Shakespeare's tragedies to roaring farce, and she was familiar with the particular technique required for each kind of performance. She had, moreover, the power that is essential to every good teacher, of imparting her knowledge to others. One of her first pupils was Frank. By this time he had taught himself all that it was possible to learn out of books or from uninstructed practice, and he was hungry for the help of a professional actor. He wanted to be shown a further line of advance and to come by a technique that was more subtle than the one he had acquired by his own efforts. Miss Randford was the very teacher he wanted, and it was largely to her experienced tuition that he owed the acquisition of an English pronunciation with so little

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in it of definite inflexion that it was impossible to tell whether the user came from England, Ireland or Scotland. Like all good teachers of acting, Miss Randford relied on Shakespeare and the Old Comedies as the best material on which to base her exercises in the art, and through her Frank developed a passion for Shakespeare that lasted all his life and made him refuse otherwise good engagements if there was any chance of being offered work in a company that played only his favourite dramatist.

If this school had never set up in Dublin, or if, by chance, he had never joined it, I think it is unlikely that either he or I would have become an actor. The opportunities of doing so were remote under the conditions then prevalent. The provincial theatres were occupied week by week by companies that came into the town on one Sunday and left it on the following one, seldom returning, or, if they did, it was a year before they came again. We had no connexion with anyone knowledgable in the professional theatre, and our people had the prejudice of a middle-class family living in a small town against anything like an unsettled life. The young man that wanted to devote himself to an artistic career, whether it was music, painting or the drama, was looked upon as being more than a little foolish, if he was not a thoroughly bad lot. Stones and moss were quoted once more with a lot about "There's no place like home" thrown in. Nowadays it would be "Safety First." We had been introduced to the maxims as copy-book headlines when we could barely toddle.

BEFORE

When one thinks of the "moss" gathered by the "rolling" of Sir Harry Lauder or Charlie Chaplin it does not seem as if the copy-book headlines are wholly reliable guides in these uncertain days. Not that Frank or I, I am bound to admit, ever managed to collect much of the commodity about our persons. Another difficulty we had to overcome was that we were shy birds, Frank and I. He had the more courage, for when he wanted anything badly he would just go and try to get it. Through his knowledge of shorthand—rare at that time—he obtained odd jobs reporting for the newspapers. This brought him in touch with strange people and gave him confidence, but in itself it would not have been enough to make him break with tradition. My own failure to pass the Civil Service examination, or hold down any responsible job, made me sadly chary of trying new ground or adventuring among people that I did not know. If Maud Randford had not wished to rest for a while in Dublin, there would have been no Irish Players and certainly no Abbey Theatre.

CHAPTER IV

At the end of its second season the Dramatic School gave a public performance in the Antient Concert Rooms to show what they had learned, and as the Lacys had no suitable scenery, Frank suggested that I should lend them mine and fit it up for them. I went to the hall and arranged everything for the show, and it was only then that I met Mr. and Mrs. Lacy for the first time. The performance was a success, but what struck me beyond everything was the difference it made to a familiar play to be produced by someone that knew, instead of guessing at the "business," the required movements and the essential characterisation of the various parts. With all the plays I had seen and helped in, it will seem a queer thing to say, or I will show up as a queerly stupid fellow, yet it is a fact that I never knew before this performance how much a play in presentation can owe to good production. The Lacys, good souls, were grateful to me for my help, and was I glad to work with real professionals, if only for a couple of nights?

The School did not open the next season. One reason for this was that the supply of possible students in Dublin was limited. But there was another and a truer explanation. The Lacys had begun to suffer from that hunger which comes inevitably upon all those who have ever travelled the open road. There is no escape from this. We may shake it off for a time. But sooner or later it comes back again twice

BEFORE

as strong as ever, and the only thing to do is to pack up and be off.

The proprietor of the Queen's Theatre at that time was J. W. Whitbread, and though most weeks in the year he booked the famous dramas from Drury Lane or the Surrey Theatre—*Hands across the Sea*, *Harbour Lights*, *The Silver King* and many others—he would sometimes produce plays written by himself. These were manufactured on the Boucicault model, with matter and story brought up to date, which renovations concealed from the unobservant their inferiority to the Boucicault melodrama in construction and dialogue. Two of these plays—*The Irishman* and *Shoulder to Shoulder*—had been produced while the School was still open, Lacy playing parts in both of them. So when his hour came upon him and he was vanquished by his desire for the road, he got the "fit-up" rights from Mr. Whitbread to play them in the small towns.

He booked a tour in the south of Ireland and engaged a company. Chalmers Mackay, a very promising Irish comedian, was his leading man. Since then Mackay has toured his own company many a year, playing Irish plays all over the kingdom with Miss Dorothy Coote, Lacy's leading lady, who became his wife. Lacy also engaged a famous Irish character actor, Frank Dalton, to play his villains, Fred Wilberforce for his juveniles, and a young Dubliner, Pat Waddock, for his character and comedy parts.

The closing of the School was a blow to Frank,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

but he had learned enough there to go on by himself with the perfecting of his elocution and voice production. He was still secure in his secretarial job, which now carried what we considered a good salary. All the same he would gladly have gone with the Lacys if they could have offered him suitable parts and a reasonable chance of continuous employment. Happily for us the plays were rehearsed in Dublin at the School, and both Frank and I were allowed to be present to watch, for the first time in our lives, a real professional company at work.

I can hardly say which was the greater, the excitement of this experience or the desire in me that I might have had any part, however small, in either of the plays, so to make my *début* as a professional actor. But the weeks of rehearsal fled by, and all too soon for us the company left Dublin to open their tour at Ennis in County Clare. Life seemed desperately dull to us then. But the anti-moss gods had put their heads together on our account. When the Lacys had been gone about a fortnight, Frank had a letter from Lacy. The "advance agent" he had engaged had left him, and he needed someone to do the work. He offered it to me, and promised to teach me my business. The salary was to be £1 a week. At last the chance had come. Although I think I knew my fate from the first, Frank and I had long debates on the advisability of accepting Lacy's offer. What could a job of that kind with a "fit-up" company lead to? Was it possible to live on a pound a week? More important still, what would

BEFORE

our parents have to say to a wild proposal of this kind? I was in a good position for recklessness. If I stayed on in Dublin there was still no opening for me, unless money or influence could make one, and both of these were out of the question so far as I could see at the moment. It was now or never for me, said I. What I did not say, though I felt and knew it, was that until I made a break from all my surroundings I should not be able to rid myself of my ever-present conviction of incompetence.

In those days parents had to be reckoned with. Frank agreed to open the negotiations at home and I was to follow this up by a personal interview. When I faced my father I knew at once that I had nothing to hope for in that quarter. "Traipse round the country as a strolling player! Certainly not!" When I asked what I should do instead, I got Micawber's reply, "Wait for something to turn up." I then urged, what indeed I thought, that at the age of eighteen one ought to be independent, especially when there were three younger children still at school, and that I couldn't agree to stay at home and be an expense to them when it had been made possible for me to keep myself by accepting Lacy's offer. How far my father credited these worthy sentiments I do not know, but his reply was clear enough. "Very well," he said. "If you are determined to go I'll not stop you. But you'll not come back again. I don't approve, and if you go, it's good-bye." I said, and it sounded flat enough, "I'm sorry, but I must take this chance to learn some

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

business that will give me a livelihood." Sad as the lack of approval was, I felt a glow from the flames of my burning boats when I wrote that night to Mr. Lacy agreeing to his terms. I was to join the company the next week at Portadown to act as "agent in advance" for Mr. J. W. Lacy's *Irishman* and *Shoulder to Shoulder* Company.

The actor's life differs in one respect from that of the inhabitant of heaven. It is full of partings. Sometimes they don't last long, though. I have many a time said tearful good-byes in Euston Station on a Sunday at the end of a tour, with repeated adjurations to "take care of yourself" and "be sure and write," only to meet the company one by one on the Monday at the agent's looking for more work. In the case of my first setting forth, of course, we all behaved as if I were going to New Zealand instead of just to Portadown, and nobody took it more seriously than myself. I had cut loose and I meant to mark the solemn occasion. I did it chiefly by insisting upon having a theatrical basket in which to pack all my few worldly belongings. I don't know for sure about the Continent, but in these islands the basket is the sign and token of the touring actor. Combined with its capacity and lightness, its great strength enables it to withstand every assault of those railway porters who daily seek its destruction; and does not the unsuccessful actor "get the basket" when all else is denied to him? In my case, no swell trunk, no portmanteau, no array of suitcases or Gladstone bags could have given me the authentic

BEFORE

thrill I got from putting everything I owned into a canvas-lined wicker hamper and sitting on the lid.

My notions of the work of an "agent in advance" were less than sketchy. I knew that he had something to do with the bills—not those representing the expenses, but the printed advertisements displayed in shop windows or pasted on the walls of the houses or hoardings in a town. I was aware that all touring companies carried such an official, and that he came to town before the company did, to prepare for their reception. But how he did it I had yet to learn. On my arrival at Portadown I sought out the Lacys and shared a meal with them and their daughter, while Miss Randford advised me about lodgings, the price of food and how to buy it. She ended by giving me the address of a house where they accommodated touring actors. After tea I explored the town, found my rooms and agreed with the landlady as to the terms I was to pay. I then proceeded to sup for the first time by myself in a room of my own with a landlady who called me Mister. The umbilical cord was cut and no mistake.

In the morning I went marketing and had another new experience buying bread and butter, bacon and eggs, and a bit of steak for my dinner. Coached by Miss Randford, I left my landlady to find the vegetables, but I gave most particular directions as to when and how my bit of steak was to be cooked. I felt a great happiness. At home meals had always appeared with a clock-like regularity and a clock-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

like reproach if you were late. Not only this, but you knew the day of the week by what you had for dinner. It never varied. Now I could eat when I liked, what I liked and as much, or as little, as I liked. I could have sausages instead of cold meat on Monday or steak instead of salt beef on Thursday. I could have a new loaf of bread when I liked instead of being bidden to "eat the stale first," and there were no queries, even with eyebrows, as to the amount of butter that smothered a slice. As for jam, I was at liberty to treat it with all the careful handling required, if you want to convey the maximum quantity to your mouth without some falling off the bread *en route*.

When I joined the company the towns we were playing in had populations that made it worth while to stay at least three nights in each place, and when we came to larger ones, like Newry, it was possible to do six nights and maybe a *matinée* for children on the Saturday. We saw to it that our programme was varied enough to attract the same people to come twice during our stay. I went on to the next town to be visited, and spent two days there arranging the posting of the bills. There were two kinds. The first announced the coming of the company, what they were playing, and the names of the artists. These were put into the hands of the local bill-poster. But the other sort—the long kind called "day-bills"—I had to place myself in the windows of every shop that would exhibit them. Other duties were to interview the hall-keeper; to see that the

BEFORE

stage would be ready for the scenery when it came; to take the dimensions for our stage carpenter, if he had never been there before; and to make a list of the various rooms that would take professionals, so that the artists could write on ahead and have their lodgings ready to go to as soon as they arrived.

When I had arranged all these and a dozen other things I returned to help Mr. Lacy with the "front of the house"—that is, the auditorium—to give a hand to the stage manager behind the curtain, or to play small parts if I was needed. In fact there were no capacities in which I could not be of real, if humble, use. After the show on Wednesday and Saturday we would pull down the "fit-up," pack up the scenery and wardrobe and take them to the railway station, where we had them loaded on a truck so that they could travel with the company in the morning to the next town. I always went on a Thursday to the town they would visit the following Monday, and got back in time to help with the show on Saturday night.

The last night of the week was invariably the roughest house, and it took three of us planted by the pay-box to prevent concerted rushes for the cheaper seats that would otherwise have carried all before them, including the night's takings up to that time. Having had plenty of experience as to what could happen in these circumstances, Mr. Lacy was prepared. All the tickets used for the various parts of the house were in rolls, and these ran on spindles in a heavy wooden box, which also contained three

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

drawers to hold the money. The box was closed by a heavy lid that shot into place by the action of a spring. The minute there was any sign of danger that lid was slammed into place, locking the box, which was pushed out of sight into the pay office. We were then free to deal as seemed best to us with individuals that were looking for free seats. The idea of making people stand in a queue had not been thought of. Even if it had, it would have needed a lot of courage to try it on a Saturday night audience in a small Irish town. The halls we liked best in which to deal with Saturday night conditions were those which had the entrances up a flight of stairs. Then any attempt to rush the pay-box was easily defeated by pushing the people back down the stairs. The most difficult kind of halls were those that had the entrance doors on the level with the street. In case you have never felt it, believe me a compact mass of sixty or seventy human beings, all moving together, has a momentum that is hard to stop. In such halls it was only by using a stout wooden barrier that would permit only one person to pass at a time that we could hope to prevent an organised rush from being successful.

One of the first things I had to learn was the various kinds and sizes of printing used by theatres and theatrical companies, and also the names of the bills on which the printing was done. In the theatre all kinds of advertisements of the show are "printing." The size of sheet most often used, either by itself or as a unit for larger ones, is the double-

BEFORE

crown, which is 30 by 20 inches. Large posters are usually made up of six, eighteen or even twenty-four sheets of double-crown paper. These, with the long thin posters called "streamers," make up the commonest types of theatrical printing. With the Lacys we never used the larger posters, because in the towns we visited none of that size were ever put up, with the exception of those declaring sales of cattle or land, in which case the local bill-poster felt himself fairly safe. Our main supply of printing was travelled with the company, but I took from it what I needed for each town when I went ahead, and I used more "day-bills" than anything else. These long bills, generally made of half a demy sheet, contained all the particulars of the play. Here is a specimen.

The Town Hall

Nenagh

For Three Nights only

MR. J. W. LACY'S Famous Company

from

The Queen's Theatre, Dublin

in the great

Spectacular Irish Dramas

"The Irishman" and "Shoulder to Shoulder"

by

J. WHITBREAD

Then followed a list of acts and scenes, of characters and the cast, of the days each play was to be performed

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and of the prices of seats, with the name of a shop where they could be bought beforehand.

In most of these small towns, as I have said, there were no hoardings to exhibit posters, so we had to rely on getting as big a window display as possible to attract attention to our forthcoming visit. In the larger towns there was a special man employed by the theatre called a "bill inspector" to look after the distribution and display of the "day-bills" or "window bills." He placed them in the same shops each week, and for showing them the shopkeeper got a free pass about once a fortnight. But in the small towns the agent had to do it himself. Very often the doing called for a considerable exercise of tact. I found by experience that if you walked into a shop and said to the owner, "Do you mind if I put this bill in your window?" you were sure to get a curt "No, you can't." The far better way was to stroll in casually, admire the window-dressing, have a chat about the weather and the chances of the favourite for the big race, or, as a last desperate resort, buy something. Then, if, as you turned to go, you hesitated and said, "Oh, by the way, would you mind very much if I put this little bill in your window?" sometimes it came off. A bit of play-acting, as I've often found, is as useful off the stage as on. Even so, some shops won't show a bill for love, money or blarney. Drapers are the most difficult, as they want the whole window for their own display, and jewellers are nearly as bad, for, as they dress the window only about once a month,

BEFORE

they object to having it disturbed. Butchers, green-grocers, bakers, confectioners, provision shops and plumbers are good, but best of all is the barber, who inclines to welcome news of any sort that he can discuss with his customers to occupy their minds while he occupies his hands with the hair on their heads or the beards on their chins. I found too that a funny story was a great help in opening the campaign. Soon I had a fund of reliable ones, and if I only got a chance to tell them, the bill was in the window before I finished. I grew pretty clever at judging which story or how rude a one was suitable to each of my victims.

The posting or pasting of the bills was a primitive affair before the arrival of the great bill-posting firms who had hoardings everywhere and would post your bills for you at $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ a sheet per week. That easy method of making money had yet to be discovered. Instead, during my novitiate, each town had its own bill-poster. This benighted individual, who was looked down upon by everybody, even by the sweep, made a precarious living by sticking bills wherever he could, or wherever he was let—on empty shops, deserted houses, forge doors, or even rain-barrels, anywhere, indeed, that did not display the warning "Stick No Bills." Usually his cargo consisted of advertisements of fairs, political meetings, sales of land, houses or cattle, or sometimes of the circus making its annual visit. When there were no bills to post he would drive cattle to the market or pigs home from it.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

This artist in bill-posting used many different kinds of brushes, from a two-tie whitewash one, that spattered paste for a couple of yards on either side of where he was supposed to be operating, to a shaving brush. It is God's truth that an optimist turned up one day with a gallipot full of paste and a shaving brush, prepared, as he thought, to post any kind of bill that ever was printed, even a twenty-four sheet, for miles around. But if, by grace, he had a brush and bucket or the equivalent, it was seldom he had the money to buy flour to make the paste. I taught myself to make a good paste by watching the wife of such an one make it after I had provided the flour. If you entrusted him with your bills it was wise to follow him into the country and see that he posted them. Otherwise, on your life he would roll them into a ball and drop them into the nearest river as he passed. Another important point was to give him enough to post three miles out of the town on every side. Again, if you did not watch him, he would most likely do the north and the south sides, and the east and west folk would never see a sign of your printing.

The use of pictorial printing helped, I found, to get the posting done properly, because pictures were more interesting—that is, if your deputy posted the proper sections together, and did not put, as he easily might, a man's head on top of a lady's costume. Yes, I got a lot of inside information about Irish life and things from my bill-posters as we wandered up the roads and down the lanes of Ireland getting our

BEFORE

bills posted. I gathered, for example, that it was practically certain that no company ever visited a town on the right week.

“What on earth do you want comin’ here on Monday week? It’s the worst week in the year. There’s a fair on the Tuesday, and it’s the first week in May, so there’ll be devotions in the chapel every evening. It’s just only waste of good bills. You’ll do no good at all, at all.”

Fairs, more than anything else, were fatal, because the country people flocked into the town from early morning and began to make for home in the early afternoon. And the townspeople, after a very busy day, were too tired to go anywhere except to bed. Again, it was no use trying to do business with a theatrical company in the South or West during the seven weeks of Lent, the whole month of May, or the three weeks preceding Christmas, for then everyone was in church in the evenings. In hay-time and harvest, on the other hand, everyone was in the fields. Between those times you had to watch out that you did not cross the path of a circus. Then it would be—“If you had only come next month!” or, “If you had only been here three weeks ago!” The solution of the problem was to keep to the North of Ireland until the South was fit for touring.

All the same it was a pleasant life touring these small towns, for the people loved the plays and the players. They wanted to be entertained, and were ready to help in any way they could to make the performances successful. If the actors had any skill

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

the play was certain to do good business during its stay. Food was plentiful and cheap, and so were lodgings. With my salary of a pound a week it was possible to live comfortably, if I did not drink too much or want to live in hotels. Those were the days when, in the words of the late Sidney Morgan, "One could get eatin' and drinkin' at twopence a pint."

The fact that we were touring Irish plays made us the more welcome. And we had a cast of all-Irish players that were known all over the country. Chalmers Mackay was the grand type of good-looking Irish comedian, and Frank Dalton, I should think, the best character actor of his time. His Danny Mann in the *Colleen Bawn* was equal to Charles Warner's great performance in *Drink*. He loved his profession and impressed on me, in case I didn't know it, what a fine calling it was. He was certain that one should study a part thoroughly before attempting to create it. He told me many a thing—as never to speak a line that did not mean something to me personally, always to think first of the audience, then of the play and my comrades who were playing in it. He showed me how to use inflexion when there was no other way to get variety, how to hold the attention of the audience when I was the speaker, and how to fade out when it was someone else's turn. Above all and everything he insisted that the audience had paid to see us perform, and that therefore every honest actor should see to it that they got value for their money. I never forgot this and I never

BEFORE

will. Frank Dalton had himself in a lesser degree that great gift that Sir Charles Hawtrey in pre-eminence possessed, of holding your attention every second he was on the stage.

Amongst my many jobs I was general understudy, and several times I had to go on to replace someone who had fallen out on account of sickness. After Mackay left us, I had to go on for his part, and though my comedy might pass muster, my appearance as a romantic juvenile left a lot to be desired. I never had the legs for a romantic juvenile.

The tour which began at Ennis in the County of Clare had worked its way up into the North of Ireland before I joined it at Portadown. Then we went to Warrenpoint, and from that to the Mackays' home town Newry. We did very well there, but after that he left us to join J. Pitt-Hardacre, who was "starring" him as Conn in *The Shaughbraun*. After some more small towns, including Omagh and Mullingar, Mr. Lacy took the company to the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, where we produced *Eileen Oge* with Pat Kinsella playing Brian O'Farrell, and I made positively my first appearance in a real theatre on a real stage. It was only a very small character part, but any part, however small, in a play performed in a regular theatre is better than playing "leads" in a "fit-up."

By the time our run at the Queen's Theatre came to an end it was too near Lent, and too late in the spring, to go touring in Ireland with safety, so it was decided to try Scotland until later on in the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

year. I was despatched to arrange the preliminaries. The first town we were to visit was Girvan. I made my way there by taking a boat from Dublin to Glasgow, and a returning Highlander and I shared the little fire in the forecastle, he telling me of his adventures in America, in the intervals of playing me jigs and reels on his tin-whistle. This charmed away the long, cold twelve-hour journey, and by the time we reached Glasgow we felt very reluctant to part company, so we had a meal together before he started on his way to Fort William and I on my way to Girvan.

This was my first experience of being in a strange land among strange people, and very queer it seemed to me on my first visit in 1891. I had thought, if I thought at all, that all English-speaking people spoke as we did in Dublin. It had never dawned on me that we had a "brogue." But in Scotland I found I had to learn a new language, in which a butcher was a "flesher," that "snell" meant cold, that a "wee" thing was a small one, and many other words and phrases that were new to me. It was in Girvan that I first discovered the difference between Sunday in Ireland and Sabbath in Scotland. Finding the time pass very slowly on my first Sunday I took up a melodeon that I found in my bed-sitting-room and tried to solace myself with a few bars of "The Irish Washerwoman." This tune was one of my star pieces, whether on the jews' harp or the melodeon—the only two musical instruments that I can play proficiently. On this occasion I hadn't got fairly

BEFORE

under way when my good landlady dashed into the room and besought me to stop playing at once. I thought at first it was my execution that afflicted her. It was not. "What would her neighbours think to hear tunes like that on the Sabbath?" If she had let rooms to "show folk," a thing she had never done before, it would be a long time before she would do it again. "If I wanted to play the melodeon, couldn't I play some nice hymn tunes on it?" But here, again, my education had been neglected. I knew no hymn tunes except "I am a little Catholic," and so my musical evening was ruined.

Girvan seemed to me a busy little town that ought to be safe for three nights' good business when the company arrived. I billed the town in every possible place, and did the "window billing" myself to be sure it was well done. But our visit was not a success. Either the people did not like Irish plays or they did not like the ones that we were playing. Whatever the reason was they did not come in. If I had died just then I think the word Girvan would have been found graven on my heart.

We tried two or three other towns with much the same result. In the last of them, Johnstone, when I came to the hall to arrange for the despatch of the scenery, I found an official of the Court in charge, for two members of the company had put a lien on it for a portion of their salary that had not been paid the previous night. In Scotland artists have the first claim on the property of the manager. I went back and got Mr. Lacy to come round. He

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

paid the claim, but it finished our tour, as he had no money to book further towns or engage fresh people to replace those who were leaving us. He offered me my fare back to Dublin, and told me he intended to go into partnership with a man named Bronson, a travelling auctioneer. This man engaged a hall in each town he visited, and sold from the stage all kinds of goods that he had bought from large manufacturing firms in the Midlands. They were "remainders" or "throw outs" that the firms were very glad to get rid of at a cheap rate. Neither the sixpenny bazaar nor the penny one had been thought of then, and it was a great opportunity for the public to get real bargains even if they were slightly flawed. This Bronson made a great parade of his stock on stands at the back of the stage, and when he had spoken for some time on the extraordinary cheapness of the goods and their unique quality, he proceeded to auction them for the best price he could get. I was offered a job at this game if I cared to take it on, and, as there was no very pressing reason why I should return to Dublin, but rather the contrary, I thought I might as well try my hand at a new kind of entertainment. With the Lacys taking part, a new method of working was forthwith put into operation. The goods on their stands were kept behind a curtain stretched across the back of the stage, and in front of it we gave an entertainment consisting of short sketches, songs and dances. The songs that we sang on the stage were printed on small sheets and sold to the audience in

BEFORE

envelopes containing six different ones, at sixpence apiece. If the purchaser, on opening it, found the name of some article stamped across the song he could claim this when the distribution took place.

When a sketch and a couple of songs had been performed, Mr. Bronson came on the stage and announced that "in order to show that the whole thing was genuine," he would distribute the prizes that had been won up to that time. The curtains were drawn back disclosing the goods. There were the pots and pans, the lace curtains, the pipes, melodeons, vases, silver-plated biscuit boxes, and the rest. He always knew before each distribution what prizes had been sold, and he took care that the first lot should contain some of the showiest goods, such as a basin and ewer or a pair of Nottingham lace curtains. This, of course, sent up the next sale of envelopes, every purchaser hoping that his luck would be in before the next distribution. The Lacys and their daughter, with myself, formed the strength of the company, so the plays had to be drastically cut, both for time and numbers. One of them was a version of *Black-eyed Susan*, in which I played several parts, with a song and a few steps of a dance. In all this no one could have been more patient than Miss Randford. That she managed to get me to sing and dance shows her ability. I had never done either in my life before. Many years afterwards, when I had to sing ballads in the Irish plays, this trouble she had taken with me made it easy for me to do my part. A voice like mine, that has a range of about six notes,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

needs very careful handling, and I have always taken care that during my vocal efforts there should never be a band with which I had to keep time and tune. The dancing was not so difficult, for John Kelly and I had once mastered a few steps of a clog dance out of a penny guide to "Step Dancing" that I expect is now many years out of print.

The show, when we got it into shape, was a great asset, for it made the goods sell so much quicker than just auctioning them. It looked like something for nothing. The songs were worth the money, and there was always the chance of winning a big prize. It was good for me too, to get production in a lot of short plays and to learn the business that belonged to them. When I returned to Dublin I taught them all to our little society, and each tour I went out with enabled me to bring home more material for Frank to work on.

The determination of Mr. Bronson to keep a cracked jug and basin amongst the goods displayed brought our tour to an unexpected close. It was a very showy pair, covered with crimson tulips, and made a splendid permanent dressing for the middle of the stand. What we dreaded was that some cranky member of an audience would claim it, discover that it was cracked, and complain that he had been diddled. One Saturday night, in a mining village in Lanarkshire, a miner who had had at least two over the eight won "a jug and basin." The tulips were what took his fancy, and he claimed them for his own. In the end he got them after

BEFORE

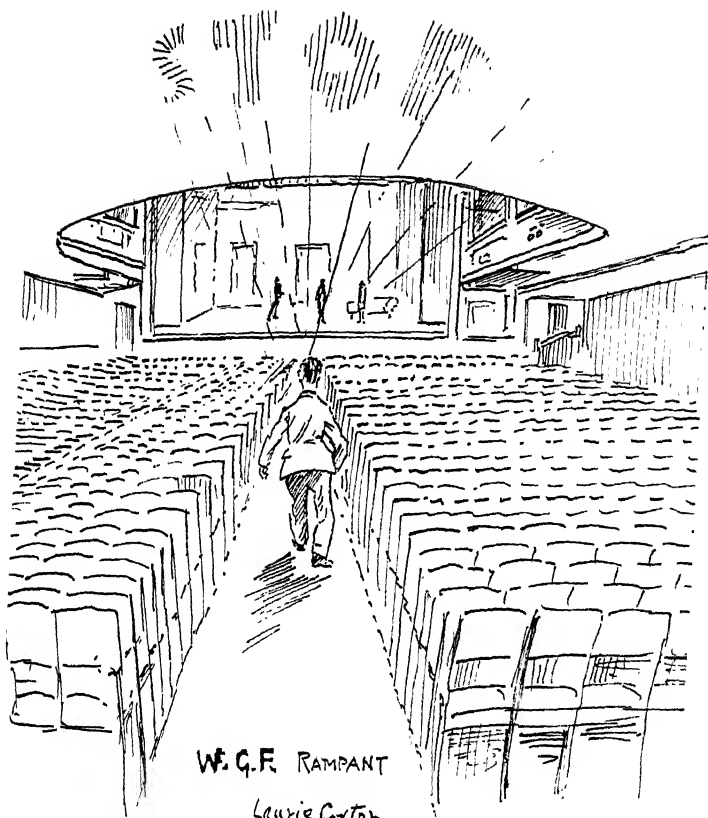
refusing everything else, and as he was going to sit down in his seat he discovered that he had four pieces of china instead of two. With a yell of fury he fired them back on the stage, where they went into more pieces. The curtains closed and abandoning everything we dashed through the stage door, reached our wagon and galloped smartly out of town. In the darkness of the night, the audience, who were busy wrecking the hall, forgot to miss us till it was too late. Thus terminated the Bazaar and our show.

As the Lacys were going back to England I took my share of what money there was, reluctantly bade them farewell, and returned to Dublin. Anyway, I had picked up some miscellaneous knowledge on this my first professional engagement.

CHAPTER V

My return to Dublin did not in any way shorten the life of the prodigal, though there was no visible fatted calf. He continued to lead a cheerful existence. In a short time I heard that J. W. Whitbread was sending *The Irishman* on tour and, screwing up my courage, I asked for a job and got it. Our company contained the pick of the Irish actors, including Frank Breen, a very fine actor of Irish "character parts."

We visited Liverpool, Manchester, Derby, Rochdale, Portsmouth, Southampton, and many other towns where the stage was large enough to take our big "mill scene," which was the principal feature of the play. All plays of that period had a special scene depicted on the posters in brilliant colours, like the ones the cinema uses to-day. It might be a fire-engine, a sawmill, or an express train about to run over a man tied to the rails. Ours was a mill, with real water to go over the wheel, and it showed two storeys, the top one of which had a trap-door in the floor by which people could be flung into the mill-race below. This last consisted of 2,000 gallons of water in a tank. In the third act the hero was attacked up in the loft by the villain and his gang and the trap was opened to throw him in, but, hero as he was, he fired them in instead, and the curtain came down on them splashing around in the water while he jeered refinedly at them through the trap-door. The wheel turned gaily all the time, and the limelight, when it was free from its usual occupation of following the hero all over the



W. G. F. RAMPANT

Laurie Cayton

BEFORE

stage, shone on the water. The mill-race tank was made of heavy wood with a rubber lining. This, with the rest of the mill, was fitted together each Monday morning and wheeled into place, where it remained for the rest of the week. On the right-hand side of the tank was a large wooden chute, and the fire-hose playing down this represented the water coming in from the dam. Each night, during this scene, the water poured down the chute until the tank was about three-quarters full, and every morning the staff had to bucket out the extra amount of water. On Saturday nights, except for the odd theatres where the whole contraption could be wheeled into the yard and tipped over, the whole 2,000 gallons had to be emptied, bucket by bucket, a job that took a couple of hours. Tuesday morning was nearly always the occasion for fierce rows with the local staff. It was too easy to get a hole in the tank, so that the water would leak through all night on to the stage, swell the traps so that they would not work and, worst of all, drip on to the scenery for the next pantomime which was always stored at the back of the cellar. Nothing will take water marks out of distemper paint, but if language could do it, the local managers would have not alone banished the water stains but the paint off the canvas as well.

At Birmingham we had a strike of the men who had to go into the tank on the Tuesday night. As they waited until they were wanted on the scene they got the extra money demanded, but when they came down the trap into the water someone took the fire-hose out

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

of the chute and washed them round the tank with the full power of the hose! Each one thought his neighbour was striking him, and the curtain came down on a real fight that was fiercer in the tank than it had ever been in the loft.

Derby I shall always remember because my dressing-room was right at the top—180 steps from the stage. As I had four changes during each performance, the repeated journey prevented me from putting on weight that week, if it did nothing else. Rochdale was the first town I played in where a great number of people wore clogs. I was awakened on Monday morning by the sound, as I thought, of a violent hailstorm. On going to the window to look out I could see no sign of it. All I could see was a man going down the street with a number of steel wires attached to a bamboo pole, and this he rattled on the window-panes as he passed. He was the “knocker up,” and for a trifling sum per week he woke up his clients so that they would be in the mill at six o’clock. He woke me and, I suspect, others, without exacting even a half-penny. About half an hour later I was again aroused by a noise as if the whole town was busy banging the cobble-stones with pieces of wood. This sound was produced by the passage of hundreds of men and women on their way to work, all wearing clogs. When they swarmed down the gallery steps of the theatre it sounded like the beating of the surf on the rocks when there is a great storm at sea. But they were a most appreciative audience, and when a thousand clogs stamp their applause one has no doubt

BEFORE

about one's reception. On the other hand, if they did not like you it was not unusual for the clog to be used as a swift signal of disapproval. But Rochdale dearly loved a hero, and our "lead" was sure to have a lot of presents left for him at the stage door—braces, slippers, smoking-caps or cigars. It was chiefly the villain who was flattered with the order of the clog.

At Birmingham we had trouble about the gallery receipts, for our manager could always count more people there than there were vouchers for, with the checker on the money "returns." He watched very carefully, but could not find out how the vouchers at the gallery door could have got back to the money-taker at the entrance. Yet the only way of accounting for the extra people was that in some way the seats were being sold twice. On Friday night he met a boy coming down the gallery stairs with two beer cans, one full and the other empty. He was thirsty, so he stopped the boy and, offering to pay for it, asked for the can of beer. The boy tried to slip past him, saying it "was special beer he got each night for the checker." The manager took the can out of his hand saying, "Get him some fresh; I want this." The can was full of metal vouchers covered with beer. On Saturday night the money "returns" corresponded exactly with the number of people in the gallery.

I met a man once at a fancy fair in charge of the "Rickety Wheel" who had been checker at the pit door of a Dublin theatre. He told me that the money-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

taker and he reckoned to make at least a couple of pounds a week re-selling seats ; a newspaper boy used to transfer them inside a copy of the evening paper. The man who complained to Sir Augustus Harris that he was admitted to the pit by the checker at Drury Lane for a 6*d.* tip, was told that " it might be so," but that checker had his house property bought and a new one would have it to buy.

It was in Liverpool that I made my first and only appearance at a police court, not, I am glad to say, as a defendant but as a witness. We were playing at Bootle, and on Saturday night, the last night of the tour, the scenery, properties and baskets had to be taken into Lime Street to be loaded on the trucks. We were last in, for all the companies playing in Liverpool had got there first, and it was about three o'clock on Sunday morning when I got back to my rooms at Bootle, to find a tall grim policeman waiting my return. I wondered how I had come into the clutches of the law. With note-book in hand the constable wanted to know—" Did I belong to the Irish play ? " " Had we been playing at Bootle ? " " Had we lost any of our baskets ? " " If so, where ? " " What kind of a basket was it ? " " Could I give the measurements fore and aft ? " I said that, to the best of my knowledge, our baskets had all been loaded into the van by the staff. Well, but he had a basket with our label on it. Would I come back to Scotland Road and identify it, and also the man who said he had found it and that it was his basket ? This man had been caught behind a hoarding trying to remove the

BEFORE

bar and padlock. I had to wait over until Monday to give evidence at Dale Street. Never will I forget the trouble that magistrate took, with each case brought before him, to be understanding and as merciful as possible, though very often it was quite evident that the police had justice on their side. I got back the basket and sent it on to the lady who owned it and then returned to Dublin, a free man, to look once more for a job.

At that time there were no theatrical agents in Ireland—I doubt if there have been any since—so that if you wanted agents to find you work it was necessary to live where they were—in Manchester, Birmingham, or Glasgow. The salaries I had been paid had not left any too much margin for saving, and against I had kept myself in clothes and other necessities I had no money to support me away from home for any length of time while I was idle. I had to rely on finding something in the “Wanted Artists” column of the *Stage* and the *Era* that I could “write in” for, and hope to be engaged. In this procedure you were always requested to send your last two references. How you envied the “Jack Neville” who was asked in print to “write in.” Fancy being Jack with a real live manager wanting him to return and play for him! Then there were advertisers who wanted artists and stated as an inducement that the theatre had a “wood roof.” These were the proprietors of booth theatres or “penny gaffs” of the superior sort who could boast a wood roof instead of a mere canvas one. Most of them were located in

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

queer out-of-the-way places like Hetton-le-Hole. And since then whenever I've been lucky enough to meet with any of them, like Pat Collins', that was playing at Bromsgrove while I was in Birmingham, I found them as well equipped as many a second-class theatre. I saw them give a great performance of a play entitled *The Nun's Daughter* at a matinée for children. I should have learned something playing six plays a week, with a repertoire of thirty, any of which they could put on at a few hours' notice. One of the "penny gaff" managers, when advertising, begged "actors who had played in Noah's Ark" to save stamps by not writing to him. Another had no vacancies for "bar counter polishers" and stipulated that "all artists must parade"! While there was a general desire on the part of the managers that "applicants should speak the Queen's English," one wondered if they did this themselves or could recognise it when spoken by others.

The "Wanted Artists" column made good reading, for there was always the hope that, tucked away in a corner, was a job that one could wire or write for, and so get on the road again. When one has grown used to changing town every Sunday it is depressing to have to stay in one place, and the longing comes for the stimulation of an audience that changes night after night, week by week. The feeling comes that life is very dull indeed.

During my absence the Ormond Dramatic Society, under my brother Frank's able supervision, had established itself as one of the most important

BEFORE

amateur societies in Dublin, and one of the actors showed special promise of making a name for himself if ever he became a professional. He was the first "juvenile man" we had—Dudley Digges. Now he is a star in New York and a prominent "character actor" with the big corporations at Hollywood. I wrote to him the other day to ask if he would tell me what he could remember of the Ormond Dramatic Society. Here are passages from his reply.

Your welcome letter reached me all right. It's a great link with the past to hear from you, and as I grow older I frequently find myself doddering into memories of Manders Terrace and our happy days in Dublin. I am glad to hear that you are contemplating a book on certain early phases of the Irish Theatre, and while the mention of the Irish Drama sends me scurrying to cover, so many books have been written on the subject from Dublin to Walla Walla, if you know where that is, I think and have always felt that the stories were incomplete without some account of the days that led into the movement.

You and I and a few others know that if it had not been for the presence of our group of enthusiastic young amateurs at that time it is a question if the theatre would have come into being when it did.

The efforts of The Irish Literary Theatre closed with the failure of *Diarmuid and Grania* by George Moore. Yeats and Martyn admitted that without Irish actors at hand it was impossible to go on.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Don't you remember they wrote "The peculiar rhythm of Irish speech and its unusual idioms are not suitable for English voices"?—sentiments with which one can easily imagine the actors of the Benson Shakespearean Company thoroughly agreed. One said, "It's what I was sayin'" and all that rot; what I mean, old chap, it's not English, not even grammar.

I have memories of a time many years later when a certain New York actress, an Irish American I believe, or at any rate one that had been prominently identified with Irish rôles, was handed the part of Brigit in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. Her comment on the part was "What sort of gibberish is this?" The performance of *The Escape of Red Hugh* and *The Harp That Once* (and only once, thank God)! You remember.

As to the days before the inception of the Irish National Theatre Society, and our work in the Ormond Dramatic Society (later W. G. Fay's Comedy Combination), I have most vivid recollections of those happy times, but I am sorry to say no programs to refer to and I have forgotten the names of the players.

My own introduction to the Fays came through my being at a party at George O'Callaghan's where I first met Ernest Vaughan. He recited "The Uncle" with such thrilling effect on me that I told him I had ambitions to be a reciter and inflicted on him the first stanzas of that immortal poem "Christmas Day in the Workhouse." He said immediately, "Oh, you must meet Fay; you must meet Fay."

BEFORE

That was the first I heard of the Fays, and he promised to call for me and bring me round. A week or two passed and I had forgotten all about the incident, when, as I went down the road one foggy night, a tall figure in a long black cloak and a large Fedora hat suddenly emerged from the gloom. It was Vaughan, looking like the embodiment of Irving, Tree and Robertson, and he spoke of the stage with such authority and elocutionary style that I was transported. We called at Manders Terrace (where the Society rehearsed) and met Frank, and I remember so well my first meeting with that gently-spoken inspiring spirit.

It was arranged that I should come to him for elocution lessons twice a week at the ridiculous figure of half-a-crown a month. There were times when I could not scrape up even that much, but it did not matter to Frank. He struggled on with me, and I went through my "O's" and "A's" and my final consonants and the "D's" and "T's" and the ending in "ing." An exercise line that I particularly remember was "The lecturer was full of his subject." How often have I had occasion to recall it since, when listening to some after-dinner speaker who was devoid of terminal facilities. After about three months' study with Frank I was given a part in *The Boots at the Swan* and invited to join the Society at the same time, don't you remember? I played Henry Higgins, the man with the unfortunate name, and my first line was "Another wet day. St. Swithin seems determined to make the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

most of his reign." Cripes! What a pun! *My Wife's Dentist* was in rehearsal at the same time, and I always remember my surprise when you walked into the drawing-room at Manders Terrace and Frank introduced you as his brother. You sat in a corner smoking your old "dudeen" and saying nothing. Vaughan was in the throes of the "Dentist," and at the end of a scene of comic jealousy you said, "That's very good, Mr. Vaughan." I marvelled at you having the audacity to open your mouth at rehearsal. Of that cast I can only remember Mrs. Knowles, Vaughan, and Frank. They all disappeared soon after Vaughan went on tour, and I succeeded to his parts. We did *Who Speaks First?* and P. J. Kelly showed up about that time. I remember *Paddy Miles' Boy*, *That Rascal Pat*, *The Irish Tutor* and *The Secret* which you gave us by word of mouth, *Advice Gratis*, *Box and Cox* and *His Last Legs*.

Do you recall our Saturday nights at Dalkey and your friend Mr. Beggs of the Medical Hall and Mr. Wilson Fair at the Coffee Palace, Townsend Street? Ah, begob, they were great days! The extremities that I was often driven to to get away from the office and procure a Prince Albert or a Dress Suit from Nagles in Marys Abbey, and the train leaving Westland Row at six o'clock! Sure we were past-masters of the art of acting and sleight of hand performance before Mr. Yeats and his little Irish plays were ever heard of. Seasoned old Troupers we were and no mistake."

BEFORE

The little society was gradually making a certain amount of reputation. As we never put on any plays that took a full evening to perform, it was possible to have always on hand a programme of short plays, which demanded a minimum of rehearsal and gave us a reasonable chance of replacing actors who moved on to other things or left the town. As everybody knows, one of the great afflictions of an amateur society is that, being mostly composed of young people, it is continually losing members, and even when it is not difficult to replace them, there exists a state of flux, which may be good for sports, dancing or card games, but is bad for the play. Nothing so weakens a repertory of plays as to be chopping and changing artists all the time.

The next time I went on the road was in answer to the advertisement of a manager, named R. B. Lewis, who was looking for a complete company to play *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He was located at Belfast. I wrote him, fixed myself up, packed the now well-weathered basket, and set out for the North. Imagine my astonishment upon meeting Mr. Lewis to find that he was a coloured actor, who had been a slave in Virginia and had come over to England in the first company of Christy Minstrels to cross the Atlantic. His present company consisted, when I arrived, of himself, three girls and five male actors, but, so far, I was the only white man in it. My employer earnestly assured me that another was even now on his way from England, and he asked would I help him to find yet another in Belfast. This I readily

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

promised to do. According to schedule, Esmé, the second white actor, turned up the next day to be our juvenile man, and he and I visited all the likely and some of the unlikely places in town, including theatres and music-halls, to find our third musketeer—without success. Facing despair in a couple of pint pots we heard somebody say, however, that there was a booth theatre just outside the town. Thither we repaired to find what we might find. Sure enough it was a company under canvas playing pantomime—eight shows a day, beginning about 1 p.m. and keeping at it until 11 p.m. Three wagons were put together, two to form the wings of the stage, the centre wagon being the “acting area.” The audience sat on wooden benches on the earth or stood around on it, and it was stipulated that ladies in the boxes should wear boots. When we stooped our heads under the flap the comedian had just been turned down by the chambermaid. We watched intently while he went into the wings and brought on to the stage a large needle and a reel of thread. Having stuck the needle grimly in one of the side wings, he proceeded to fasten one end of a piece of thread to it and the other end round his neck. Then mounting on a threepenny-piece he jumped off it and was hanged. The suicide was a great success with the audience—and with us. It was on a level with those turns by means of which Pellissier was later to make Londoners laugh year after year. Here was acting with no frills on it, to be appreciated by other actors as much as by the simplest bumpkin there.

BEFORE

The man who played the wicked uncle was monstrous tall and dark, and he too struck me as being a fine actor. Accordingly, having seen the show through, Esmé and I went round to the back, invited this gentleman to come out for a little refreshment, and put our proposition to him. By good luck he was as free as bad air. He had been on tour with a "ghost show" (this always meant "Pepper's Ghost") which had "dried up" in some out-of-the-way spot, whereupon he had walked it to Belfast and was now, he said, working at the booth only until better things "transpired." He was overjoyed to go with us, so we brought him right along and Lewis fixed him up for the "heavies" on the spot. Our new friend, who was, as I have said, tall for an actor—maybe six feet high—wore the longest morning coat I ever laid eyes on, and I've seen one or two. And down the very centre of the long back of this long coat was a long cut that had been done with a knife. This cut the wearer had repaired with that peculiar form of cross-stitch—or is it herring-boning?—which male menders sometimes use because it covers a lot of ground quickly, and never mind how it looks.

We found the "fit-up" down on the quay in one of the steamer sheds. It seemed in need of repair, so while we rehearsed *Uncle Tom*, George (our new man in the coat) and I tried to make it look a bit more decent in our spare time. We played a farce each evening followed by five acts of *Uncle Tom* and finished up the performance with variety turns. The boss was a very good boss—as good as any white one and

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

better than many. George did a "lightning cartoon" turn, Esmé was a "female impersonator" in a long fair wig with curls, Little Eva gave a song and stomach dance, Topsy sang comic songs, and the coloured boys did all sorts of step dances. Esmé combined his juvenile stuff and female impersonation with playing the piano in front of the curtain between-whiles, as that was the only orchestra we had. I played in all the farces, stage-managed the whole entertainment and took the part of Marks the Lawyer in *Uncle Tom*. If you think any of us had much time on our hands you've guessed wrong. We played a lot in court houses because, if the police gave you leave to perform, there was no rent to pay. A Judge's bench, augmented with planks laid across the tops of whisky casks, and with coach candles nailed to the front of it for footlights, makes a good enough stage. In our company the coloured actors did all the rough work and were most useful when we had, as we sometimes did, to assemble our stage from various points of the compass. It was no trouble to any of them to walk half a mile with a full-sized whisky cask on his head, serenely smoking a cigarette the while. Our auditorium was that part of the seating accommodation provided for the public when the Court was sitting, but when audiences were good they overflowed into the dock and round the solicitors' table. As a rule we dressed on the stairs at the back, two steps to each man, while the girls did the best they could with the Judge's retiring room, from which a step ladder took them on to the stage. Our company was the

BEFORE

first that ever toured *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Ireland, and in most of the towns we visited, the people had never seen a coloured man or woman, still less a coloured actor, so we had an attraction that no other touring company ever possessed. I learned from these black boys a thing worth knowing—the difference between “coloured gemmen” and “black trash.” They were wonderful dancers too, with a genius for improvising new steps and new harmonies for the plantation songs they so beautifully sang. At all times they were full of good-humour and were ready to make the best of all events, good or bad. One song has stayed in my mind, perhaps because to this day I don't know what it means :

The old ark's a moverin', a moverin' along;
Climb up, Sally, an' climb up, Joe,
The old ark's a moverin' along.
Climb up, Michael, and a climb up, Chloe,
The old ark's a moverin' along.
The old ark's a moverin', a moverin', a moverin',
The old ark's a moverin' along.

The secret of their step dancing, they told me, was “due to de nerves in de foot, boh.”

We got into Letterkenny on the day of the half-yearly “Hiring Fair.” It was the day on which the farm servants came into the town to find new employment, and the farmers to look them over and hire them, if suitable, for the next six months. It was like a slave market except that the slaves had some say in settling the price to be paid for their labour. Most of them, when they left the town that day, would

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

never see even a village for the next six months or a year, when they would again seek to change their masters.

It was a bad day for us, being a combination of a fair and a market, for country folk did their shopping at the same time as they hired their servants. We proposed having a *matinée*, but how to coax the people out of the streets into the hall was a problem. If we did not show until evening they would all be away home and the shopkeepers too tired to come in. However, we thought of a new plan.

When our "fit-up" was erected we gave two of the boys two of the large bowie knives that were used in the play, and instructed them to approach the centre of the town from different sides. When they met they were to start an argument, call each other "black trash," or anything else they liked, and then make an onslaught on each other with the knives and run as hard as they could, one after one, down the main street and into the hall. It took three of us all our time to sell the tickets fast enough to the crowd that followed them, and we played to a full house.

We drew our salaries each night before the curtain went up. If we didn't draw it didn't go up. It wasn't that we distrusted each other, but it prevented accidents. It was a well-known fact that the boss went to the post-office every morning to bank the last night's takings, and once there nothing would ever get them out again. George, by skilful borrowing, usually managed to keep a couple of weeks ahead with his salary. "Subbing" was an art in those days,

BEFORE

and old-timers, like George, had brought the raising of advances to a very fine art indeed.

Mr. Lewis had a dog, a huge St. Bernard, that was his companion night and day. All the time I was with him he never once bought a rail ticket for that animal. There was a regular procedure. When we reached the station we left the dog outside it, and we all took our places in the train, except for the boss, who walked up and down the platform, leaving the carriage door open. As soon as the whistle went and the train began to move, the boss stepped into the carriage and called to his pet. It jumped the wall or the gate, or what-not, and dashed in beside us just in time for us to shut the door in the face of the authorities.

Of course they telephoned at once on to our destination. But we were ready for that. When we reached there the company passed out of the station, giving up their tickets, but leaving the boss and his dog behind. Then the collector asked where was the dog's ticket, and as there wasn't one, he said, "All right: we'll retain the dog!" The boss said, "All right, do," and passed himself through the barrier, after which he called to the dog. There was never a station staff in Ireland had the courage to hold him while he was obeying the call.

Like the rest of us he was a bit of an actor, that dog. He was trained to attack me as Marks the Lawyer, and to tear from me the umbrella that was my badge of beastliness, struggling with me until I fell over, when he stood on me and growled. His cue for doing this was a shot from a revolver. But we had to be

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

careful. For if he heard the gun at any other time he was liable to leave the boss at the door of the hall and charge, ploughing right through the audience on his way to the stage to do his turn. Never a human actor obeyed the call to duty with less hesitation.

In Buncrana I fell sick and could not play, and Dolly, one of our "gals," had to double Topsy and Marks the Lawyer. I felt pretty bad, and if I had been in funds I would have tried to get back to Dublin. The local priest came in to see me one night and offered me enough to take me home, but I decided to stick the show. I was grateful, though. He had never seen me before and show folk are not supposed to be the safest people to lend money to, but when I pointed this out he just said, "If you never send it back, sure there will be more come to me from where this did."

We went on to Strabane and I managed to play the first night by having a chair on each side of the stage to sit on as I came off and wait on till my next entrance. George and Esmé helped me home, and the next thing I remember was seeing my landlord busy tearing the wall-paper off my room. I wondered had he or I gone crazy, or both. Then two men in uniform came and asked me to get up and come for a jaunt with them and they would kindly take my mattress along for me to lie on. Then I was in a bare room with the walls washed bluish-white and a meagre fire trying to warm them up, while a huge woman in a checked uniform made the bed, uttering queer noises all the time she did it. By a wonderful exercise of reason I concluded that what little wits I ever had were now gone from

BEFORE

me, and that the fate predicted of all fools that go on the stage had come upon me. I had dreams that my father was come to the lunatic asylum to see me, though I couldn't make out what had brought him . . . dreams of being inveigled into a big barge on the canal and put down into a hold full of heavy sacks which began to squeeze me tighter and tighter . . . dreams of being chased all through Strabane in my sark . . . dreams—the worst of all to the actor—of being left behind by the show. One evening I woke from it all to find a pretty woman in a nurse's uniform sitting by my bed. Why was she here? Where was I? What did it all mean?

I had been off my head for fourteen days with typhoid. At first I wouldn't believe it. But she showed me the chart that hung over the bed. I had been out of it all right, but where? The show had certainly left me behind. I spent the next two months in that infirmary. I was the only patient and they made a fuss of me. Back again in Dublin my hair all fell out. Then it grew in again, black instead of brown, and curls! But, alas! the curls were not permanent. Those weren't invented yet. I had three months without any solid food and wasn't able to walk a hundred yards. I had no butter for a year.

But I got well and was ready for more trouble. I tried hard to find *Uncle Tom's Cabin* again, but the house in Fermoy that Lewis was staying in had caught fire one night. He saved the three girls that had rooms there, and I daresay the dog would help. But when he went back to rescue his money, the roof fell

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

on him and he was burned to death. He was the only coloured man that toured Ireland playing *Uncle Tom*—a good actor, a beautiful singer and a kind manager to his company. May he rest in peace in Irish soil.

CHAPTER VI

OF all the many companies of actors touring these islands I suppose the company that was at it longest was the one called *La Comédie Anglaise*. It was managed by Miss Maggie Morton and her partner Dobell. To my own knowledge it has been on the road for at least forty years, and it may well have toured longer than that. Playing the most successful dramas of the time, up and down the country, *La Comédie Anglaise* became what the advertisers call a household word. And the name of Henry Chattell was a very good second.

I mention it because my next engagement was with one of Maggie Morton's leading men, who was going into management on his own account, and proposed touring Ireland to get some experience. When I joined H. E. Bailey's Comedy Company—I think it was in Nenagh in Tipperary—the plays he intended to do were *Mr. Barnes of New York* (one of the earliest thrillers), *A Man's Shadow*, *East Lynne* (the play everyone toured because it was free of royalties) and *The Shaughbraun*.

H. E. Bailey was a fine upstanding man, six feet high and built in proportion, and he thought that if he had been a boxer instead of an actor he would have been happier. One great trouble with him was, that whenever we were doing badly with the plays, he wanted to challenge anyone in the town to box him for £5 a side. With all due respect to his prowess we felt that if ever it came to business he would meet his

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

match and be knocked out; for you never know who can fight in Ireland until you try. If he was put out in a round or two we should have to pack up the show and leave pretty fast, for in all likelihood such an event would be followed by a general *mêlée* with the whole company, who might or might not be good at the boxing. Bailey was a naturalistic actor, and when playing he was dead in earnest. In *Mr. Barnes of New York* I played a newspaper boy in a costume that consisted of a ragged shirt and an old pair of trousers and shoes. We had a struggle together in one scene, and every time we played it, he managed to tear my chest with his finger-nails. When we came off the stage I drew his attention to the damage he had caused to my cuticle, but this had no effect whatever. It was not that he wanted to be rough, but when he fought he fought, and the other fellow had just to look out for himself. Now, all the fights I had on the stage in other companies, we arranged them, counted each move and then timed it, and I didn't like being treated rough when there was no necessity. I gave him a final warning that things would happen if he did not mend his ways. It was useless. So the next time we played *Barnes* I made a pin-cushion of the front of my shirt with the points of the pins outermost. The language Bailey used in the struggle that night had more realism than at any previous performance. I had no scratches on my chest either.

He was himself a patient man, which was notable at a time when most managers had shocking tempers at rehearsal, and not only said things but did them as

BEFORE

well. We had a young man join us who had only just left Trinity College, Dublin, and this was his first job. His first part was Richard Hare in *East Lynne*. Nobody was ever able to count the times he had to say, "Ah, I see my sister Barbara standing at the gate, but alas! I cannot enter," before H. E. B. would pass it. But the sentence they had the worst time with was out of *The Shaughbraun*. It was "Take it back, Kinsella, I will not buy my liberty at the price of any man's life; I will take my chance." The wretched novice tried "TAKE IT BACK, KINSELLA. I will not buy my LIBERTY at the price of—any man's LIFE; I will take my chance." "TAKE it back, KINSELLA. I WILL NOT BUY my liberty at the price of ANY MAN'S LIFE; I will take my chance." Then he tried "Take it back, Kinsella. I will NOT buy my liberty at the PRICE OF ANY MAN'S LIFE; I will take my chance." And so on it went different each time, except only for the beginner's love of dropping the end of each speech, until Bailey gave it up in despair. It finally came over to the audience as "TAKE it back, Kinsella. I will not buy my liberty at the price of any MAN'S life; I will take MY CHANCE."

We left Ireland to avoid the approach of Christmas, which is always a bad time. Indeed the last weeks of November and the whole of December until after the 25th are recognised times when poor houses are the rule and not the exception, and this is true no matter what kind of show you are offering.

We opened in Bangor with *The Shaughbraun*, in

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

which I always played Harvey Duff the informer. He commits suicide in the last act rather than be captured, by jumping off the cliffs into the sea. The opening performance was spoiled, for when Harvey rushed up the cliffs to jump over, he missed his footing, landed in the middle of the back scene representing the sea and disappeared behind the stage, wrapped up in it. An accident like this brings a good play to a sad and sudden end. There is nothing to do but lower the curtain while the audience are still laughing, and having got it down keep it down. And so it was on our first night. In Carmarthen we were unfortunate enough to arrive on the day of the monthly fair. Things did not look very promising for our show in the evening. In an evil moment, remembering our success with the black boys in Letterkenny, I suggested we should try the same experiment of a knife fight in the market square. But I had not allowed for the difference in temperament between the Welsh and the Irish Celt. On the Welsh occasion there was no great stir among the spectators. They simply fetched the police, and the two boys were arrested for disturbing the peace. It took Bailey all his time and patience to convince the inspector that this was merely a forlorn hope in the publicity line. The Welsh police needed a lot of coaching to perceive that there could be any connexion between a fight in the street and a play that was taking place at the Town Hall. Wales at that time was not a home of the drama as it is to-day, when there are dramatic societies all over the country

BEFORE

producing plays all the year round. We struggled on to Criccieth and Corwen, doing a little worse business in each town, until the week before Christmas found us lost in the depths of the country at a place they called Bala. Why we went there heaven knows, for I don't think that a theatrical company ever came there more than once in a couple of years, if that. At any rate they did not want us or our plays for their Christmas treat, and in the middle of the week H. E. B. "shot the moon" for London, and my friend from Trinity College and I made shift to get back to Dublin. It was fortunately not an expensive journey. I think ten shillings was all that was needed, and a few judicious telegrams brought us the necessary relief. Without any exaggerated regrets we left Bala behind for all time, and we got back to Dublin punctually for our own Christmas festivities.

After a brief spell at home, where I was now received without being fêted, I found rooms for myself down town, as the journey to the suburbs twice a day had become a bother. It seemed a waste to go the double distance when it was only for a meal and a bed. After that I never stayed at home again, but lived in one place or another—sometimes on the south side of the river and sometimes on the north. I helped Frank with his amateurs and played a part myself when we had no one better to do it. Towards the end of February I saw an advertisement from Lloyd's Mexican Circus for someone to assist the advance agent, and as that was a chance to get experience in a new line of work I wrote to the address

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in Ballinasloe and offered my valuable services with only the vaguest notions of the sort of work that was required, for though I was familiar with the agent's job for a theatrical company I had no other experience of advance work. After a brief delay I had a letter from the agent himself, a man named Stone, asking me would I join him at Ballinasloe and stating that the terms were thirty shillings a week and I was to do what I was told. I got down to Ballinasloe and looked him up. He was staying at a small hotel, which impressed me, and here he explained to me the kind of work the advance agent of a circus had to do.

We had a small covered van about the size of a baker's van. It was fitted all round inside with shelves to hold the printing of different sizes. We carried a month's supply of all kinds, from double-crowns, to put into shop windows, to twelve sheets for barn doors and the like, and of course the most of it was pictorial stuff with horses, clowns, bare-back riders and acrobats. I was taken to a stable behind the house and there introduced to the horse that was to take us round, and told to give him a good grooming, after which I could have the evening off. His name was Mazeppa.

There was a brush, I was told, and a curry-comb in the van. I looked carefully and found the brush, but I could see nothing resembling what I called a comb. There was only an iron thing in a wooden handle that looked like a miniature rake, but not a comb could I find. I politely asked one of the men in the yard to lend me a curry-comb, and he walked

BEFORE

into the stable and fetched me the spit of the little rake in the van. I then guessed what a curry-comb looked like, but I still had not the remotest idea of how to use one. I tried scraping Mazeppa's back with it, but he evinced such violent objections to my method of making his toilet that I judged there must be something wrong with it. I sat round for a bit, keeping a respectful distance, until one of the yard men started to groom one of the other steeds, and by watching him I learned the proper way to groom a horse, which is accomplished by emitting a hissing sound through the groomer's teeth.

There was a fair in the town, and I never saw so many horses and cattle together in one place before. I discovered the true significance of the saying I had often heard used sarcastically—"Beef to the heel like a Ballinasloe heifer."

In the morning I was told to harness up and bring the van round to the front door, for we were to make Athlone that day. I had gone driving behind horses and had seen plenty of horses and plenty of harness, but had never tried before to put the two together. These are the little things in life that reveal us to ourselves. My first effort was to get the collar on, for I felt that this would be a move in the right direction. But I failed to divine that you had to get the broad end over his head first and then turn the thing round, and I spent a heap of time trying in vain to squeeze the beast's head through the thin end without any kind of success. Every time I thought I had managed it Mazeppa would blink his eyes, shake his

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

head and throw it off again. A young lad watched my manœuvres for a while before he came to the rescue with "Bedad, it's easy seein' you don't know a great deal about horses." In the long run, with his help, I marched Mazeppa round to the front door of the hotel with all his trappings complete and the van following well behind him. The agent emerged with a bulldog which took a seat up beside him as we spanked off, one on either side of the front bench of the van. This it was to be with a circus.

We got under way for Athlone on the Shannon. I learned that the daily journey was about ten miles and on Sunday twenty. We did the same journeys that the circus would do when it followed us a fortnight later, preceded a week in advance by a second-hand fire-engine that was one of our properties. Our business was to post the bills, to arrange for the accommodation of the principal artists, to hire the field, and to see that a proper supply of fodder was on the ground what time the show arrived there. We were not supposed to get further in advance than fourteen days in case Mr. Lloyd might change his mind and alter the route, a thing he did once or twice while I was with the show. The tenting season for circuses was from April until they went into winter quarters in October. During those six months it travelled steadily up and down the country, playing a town a day except on Sundays. Of course, big towns like Belfast or Cork, Limerick or Waterford, got a week's performances, and this gave us a rest. We put up bills anywhere they would allow them to be posted, and this was my special job

BEFORE

on the way from one little town to the next. Any empty cottage got one on the door and another on the window. The forge door was always a safe place, for the smith might get some work shoeing the horses for the show when it arrived. Other chosen spots were telegraph poles, rain-water barrels under the eaves of cottages and either ends of bridges. As we went we put bills into the hands of local bill-posters on both sides of our route, with instructions to post three miles out and wire us if there were any signs of another circus coming the same way.

Soon I learned to distinguish the main road from a by-road, to take the right turning by the way of the traffic marks, to look for the church steeple as the first indication that a town was near—for in Ireland there are no factory chimneys. It was little use asking people about distances, for as they thought nothing of walking ten miles, and always Irish miles, they were not reliable guides as to how far we might be from the next town. Stone had been over most of the route many a time and he knew his way without much help, but occasionally we got into difficulties. One evening towards sundown we had not come in sight of our town when we should, and he stopped a passing man to ask his advice as to the road still to be travelled. The man said, "Well, sir, I would say but you have six good miles to go yet, but it may be only five, still and all I think it's nearer to seven one way or another." When we reached the town we found it was only four.

Whether our spirits might be up or down, the bulldog enjoyed every minute of the drive each day, and

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

his appearance kept all sorts of stray folk from coming too near the van, if, by chance, we both had to leave it at the same time. He looked ferocious and growled like a grizzly at any stranger. But he was the quietest, most peaceable dog I ever met.

After a little practice I got so expert at fly-posting that I could hop off the van, post a bill and be back up on it again without Stone having to alter the pace at which he was driving. In the country we never drove at any great speed, or for a long time, because we had to be sure that Mazeppa would be ready for the road each day, and except on Sunday he never got a long rest.

It was a fine change, after touring with a theatrical company and changing towns once a week, to travel every day instead, and without taking a train. To be in the open country day after day was a precious experience to one who would never have lived in a town if he could have lived out of it. And Ireland in the spring-time is something to see—not at motor-car but at van pace. If the day's journey was to be a long one we pulled into the roadside at midday and made a meal of some of the provisions we carried along with the printing. Often we would share our meal with tinkers or with tramps that would be travelling the same road that we were going. It is the unwritten law of the circus to be friendly with all other travellers, for we could learn from them what rival shows, if any, were on the road that season, and if they were likely to cross our path on our way to the south. No small town could stand visits from two

BEFORE

circuses within three months of each other, so we tried as far as possible to keep off each other's routes. Sometimes Mr. Lloyd would send instructions for us to post eighteen towns in sets of six, each set being in different directions. Then the circus would play the middle six in hopes that the other postings would deter a rival show from coming that way. Never mind the disappointment of those who counted on the circus coming and never saw the shade of it! We were aware, of course, that other managers might be up to the same tricks.

I learned and saw more of Ireland travelling with Lloyd's Mexican Circus than I did with all the dramatic companies I had toured with before put together. Some, at least, of the knowledge I gathered was to be of practical value to me afterwards, when I had to produce, at the Abbey Theatre, plays written about many different parts of the country from Galway to Cork.

We drove from Ballinasloe right down south through Banagher, Roscrea, Kilkenny, Carrick and Waterford, to Tramore. Then we turned west, through Dungarvan into County Cork. Then, by Youghal and Middleton, to the city of Cork, and so to Killarney, where we got a chance to visit the lakes on our way to Cahirciveen in the west of Kerry. We turned north here and worked our way north-west, through Limerick and Clare, on to Galway. I never properly saw the sun set until I watched it sink into the Atlantic Ocean on a cloudy evening at Kilkee.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

One evening we stopped our day's journey at a hamlet of about three houses and a public-house near Tulla, and I was attending as usual to the comfort of Mazeppa before starting my own meal. It was in the dusk, and as I came to the door the Man of the House was greeted by someone passing, with "It's a fine night, so it is, glory be to God." "It is, Michael, it is surely," answered the landlord. When the man had passed out of hearing I asked who he was, and was told, "Why, he's a poor mountainy man, God help him, from above at Knockeven." So I found out that the people living in a village of four houses think but poorly and pitifully of those who live in the scattered cottages away on the hill-sides—"mountainy men, God help them!"

One of the rarest things to get in this world is a frank opinion of oneself from another person uttered without flattery or spite, but I got it in Limerick. There was a fair on the day we arrived, and it was with difficulty that I managed to get a room to sleep in, and when I did it was one with two beds in it. I demurred at sleeping in a room with strangers, but the landlady quieted my scruples by saying, "They are only two slaters, decent boys, and they won't be disturbing you at all. As quiet as lambs they are." Having a long journey the next day and being very tired, I got to bed at ten o'clock, but I was awakened about an hour later by a loud argument between the lamb-like "decent" boys who were disrobing at the same time. "There's no team ever was bred in Dublin could lick the Limerick boys, believe you me!"

BEFORE

one shouted. The other chimed in with "Will you shut up and hould your whisht, Joe?" "I will not, and the divil a one can make me," said Joe, hopping about in his shirt. "You'll wake the decent man in the other bed, so you will. Let you get into bed and be quiet," counselled the other lad. "Ah!" said Joe, "to hell wid him. Who's he anyway, but the bloody bill-poster from Lloyd's Circus?" Thus by travelling one may learn a salutary humility and find out where one stands in the social scale.

The principal posting station at Kanturk was on the gable end of a house twenty feet from the ground, which meant that all the posting must be done from a ladder. The day I had to get a display on to it there was heavy rain, and as fast as I got the sheets on to the wall the rain washed them off again. Also, the gutter to the roof was broken in two places, and, every time I lifted my arms to coax a bill on to the wall, the water from the gutters poured down my sleeves. It would have been a good five-minutes' circus turn and me the clown, but as a bill-poster it took me nearly two hours to get a single twelve-sheets into place, and when I did I was as wet as if I had spent the time in the river. It was a wet place, Kanturk.

Before I came to work on a circus I had often wondered what made country people so nervous when they came into a town, but now that most of our travelling took us over quiet country roads or through little villages with only the one street, I found that when it came to driving Mazeppa through Kilkenny or Ennis or towns of that size I instinctively kept the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

van close to the kerb, feeling that the traffic was tremendous. These are not what you would call big towns, and the motor-car had yet to add to the horrors of town traffic. I expect that if I had to do the same to-day I would get down as soon as we reached the suburbs and lead Mazeppa until we were safely into the country once more. The journey through Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Clare took us into country unlike that of the East Coast. It was wilder and more full of colour, the blues and purples on the mountains were deeper and stronger than they were on my side of Ireland, and the spectacle of clouds seen across the Atlantic from Kilkee had a splendour of design and of colour beyond any skies I had ever seen before in all my wanderings.

On the road outside Killorglin I passed an old man driving a pig into the town with a sugan (hay rope) tied to its leg. He was wearing a costume such as I had always supposed never existed on land or sea but only in the imaginations of theatrical costumiers or in the fancy of carvers of those little figures out of bog oak that we sell to tourists from the Isle of Man. In the Abbey Theatre any wearer of it was known as "The Stage Irishman." This real Irishman had a tail-coat of frieze with two shiny brass buttons at the waist, a double-breasted waistcoat, and a linen shirt with a tucked front, the collar attached to the shirt and a black cravat round it. His corduroy breeches were buttoned below the knee, and he had home-knitted stockings and brogues. The clothes were green at the seams but clean and tidy, and there he

BEFORE

was walking the road with us, a living example of the Irish peasant of the days of Lover and Lever.

I learned, too, with the circus that to "lope" was to get down and walk, especially going uphill, when the horses wanted as little weight as possible. To "scarper" was to run, and your name was your "monnicker." The band were "windjammers," and to play the piano was to "spank the dominoes." "Denari" was money, and when you heard the danger cry, "Hey Rube!" you had best get to safety with all speed. I have found since that most of those are gipsy terms.

I stayed with Stone until we got to Galway, and then there was some talk of the show going off the road because of the bad weather. The future dates he could manage without my help. So I went back to Dublin with a bit of inside knowledge about a kind of life that had been strange to me, and a personal experience of the roads, the villages and the towns that stood me in good stead later on, when, for seven years, I scarcely produced any but peasant plays.

Things were not very busy theatrically when I got home, so I spent some months helping an engineer with his electrical work. He was one of the chief engineers attached to the Corporation Electric Light Station in Dublin, and he had a small workshop at his house, where I picked up the rudiments of electrical engineering, helping him to alter all the switches in the arc lamps in the streets, from the boxwood spindles, on which they had worked, to insulated metal ones. In his free time he took on the job of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

overhauling the electrical plant at one or two places. One was the College of Surgeons, and another one of our leading fishmongers, "Pile, Powell and Mooney's." At the College of Surgeons the plant was in the basement, in another part of which they stored the bodies that were used for dissecting. They were gruesome things to have to work near, but the old Scotsman who had charge of them looked on them as we did on our spanners.

In November I had a letter from Harry Lofting saying he had joined a company that was going to tour *The Middleman*, by Henry Arthur Jones, and would I come if he could fix me up? He had just finished with a "ghost show." I have said elsewhere that this meant "Pepper's Ghost," and Harry's last company had confined itself to plays involving a ghost scene for which they used Professor Pepper's famous illusion. These were the best ghosts in the theatre up to then, for they could walk through the walls, the tables, and even the other actors on the stage. But there was always one trouble about "ghost shows." The illusion was worked by means of a huge piece of plate-glass suspended in front of the stage, filling nearly the whole of the proscenium opening. Not to speak of the care of travelling that property, it took actors with the voices of bulls to get over the top of it to the audience. Anybody playing in a "ghost show" had to be like an actor a friend of mine in Omagh told me about once. "He was a great and noble actor, mister, for when he was speaking on the stage in the Town Hall we could hear him beyond at the church-

BEFORE

yard, and there's a good quarter of a mile between them."

As soon as I got Harry's letter, engineering went by the switchboard, and in a week's time I was back to trouble and grease-paint in Chelmsford. We did some more dates in Essex, then crossing the river we played through Kent. But the company was not a strong one, nor the play either, even if it was good drama. At any rate we finished at Gravesend, and I went up to London with the scenery and properties and delivered them to the woman whose share of the venture they were.

She lived at Croydon, and I spent some pleasant enough winter weeks managing a roller-skating rink there for her. But when the spring came in the skates went out, and so did I—back to the homeland again. I had thought that I would stay in London a while and see if it was not possible to find something to do. An anxious relative (relatives were still anxious) had written to me that there was always a shortage of lighthouse-keepers, and as I was in London why not apply for the job? I thought the idea of getting confined away at sea in a lighthouse where you were relieved once a month had a sinister significance. But I was willing to try anything—once. So I made my way into the city for the first time and investigated the Mansion House, Fenchurch Street, Broad Street and Lombard Street. However, I came to the conclusion that I hadn't the courage to attack one of the great office buildings in search of a lighthouse-keeper's work, or any other. Those English commissionaires

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

alone frightened me nearly to death. People who have lived in a big city all their lives can have no suspicion of the loneliness that comes over you when you think that there is nowhere you belong and no one that wants you in all the fifty square miles of houses that make up the town of London. It was home for me.

In Dublin I found a letter from Stone saying he had left the circus and he was going to get a company together to tour Ireland, and what about it? I joined him at Naas in Kildare and found that he was trying to make all his own scenery, so I turned to and we got it more or less ready by the time the rest of the company arrived for rehearsal. Then I realised that it was Stone's first theatrical management and he did not know how to conduct his rehearsals, so I had to do them as well. We opened our tour playing *Our Boys* and *Green Bushes*. In the first play I was cast for the dude part, Talbot Champneys, but the only line of it I can remember now is that some place he says "Life is too short for chess," a sentiment with which I thoroughly agreed. When we came to stage *Green Bushes* I found that Stone had not bought, as he had meant to do, a cave scene, and as there was no time to send for one to Dublin, I got six rolls of white wall-paper, and cutting it into strips, pasted enough together to make the scene. Spreading this on the hall floor I painted the cave on it and, attaching it to two battens, mounted it on the frame at the back. It worked well until the leading lady one night, making her big exit up stage, slipped and grabbed the scenery to steady herself, when a piece of rock, seven feet by

BEFORE

nine, came away in her hand and floated gracefully on to the stage.

When I got back from this tour Frank wanted me to stay in Dublin and work with him. He even suggested that I ought to try to settle down. Now I considered, and Frank urged, that electricity was a new motive power that was sure to be used more and more, and there was money in it for anyone who knew the technical side. I was not making my fortune as an actor, and I wanted to have some means of living that would leave me free to devote more time to the theatre. So I decided I would give it a trial. I helped the same engineer as before with several jobs, and then he got me the charge of a small plant that illuminated the premises of the fishmonger we had already overhauled. It had only to be kept running from dusk until the shop closed at 6 p.m. and, in consequence, was only a winter job. It has been impressed on my mind that there is still daylight at 6 p.m. in March, for it was then I got the sack. But it was all right while it lasted. It wasn't what one would call a strenuous job, for so long as the engine behaved itself, and the brushes on the commutator of the dynamo didn't try to have a firework display on their own, there was little to do except throw spanners at the rats that swarmed all over a place that was full of titbits for them. I don't think I ever did more in that way, though, than dislodge one occasionally from doing a circus act along the water-pipes of the engine.

At Christmas time a swan was sent in by a customer to be killed and dressed, and this was no nice easy work like preparing a turkey for the table. The poulterer

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

stunned the bird to kill it in the usual way, and gave it to one of the boys to pluck. The boy, having plenty of experience with chickens, sat down on his stool beside the big feather box, tucked the swan's head under his arm and got well on with the plucking. But it takes a heavy blow to stun a swan dead, and in a few minutes this one came to itself, kicked the boy under the chin and knocked him right into the box of feathers. The boy, being game, took the bird with him lashing out with its wings and feet and beak, and there was a riot in that box that was fit for a Hollywood film, until two of the men went to his rescue and killed the bird.

While I was on this job, what time I could spare from rehearsals and sleep was spent in reading books on electricity. In a while I was able to apply to a firm of electrical contractors as an improver, and what I did not know about the practical side I picked up by examining my mates' work while they were away at meals. I drew my first wages on a pouring wet Saturday and, money in hand, made a dash for the tram. But before I reached it I stumbled, and away went my week's earnings into the mud. When the many kind friends that gathered round me had helped to put it together again, about two-thirds of it was missing. The next Saturday I put my takings away safely before I left the shop.

It was while I was with this firm that I first had to wear spectacles. Up to then I had managed, very skilfully as I thought, to conceal the fact that I was short-sighted, for I believed only soft kind of people wore glasses. But I was given a job to erect a light

BEFORE

at the end of a long cellar, the steel tubing containing the wires to be run along the centre of the ceiling all the way. When I had it finished I was standing at the entrance thinking what a good job it was, when the boss came behind me and said, "What did you want to put all those bends in it for?"

"There are no bends in it. The tubing is quite straight," I replied, quite offended.

He looked at me for a moment, and then said, "Come here beside me and look at it. Now, is it straight?"

"Absolutely," said I.

"What's wrong with you, my lad, is that you are short-sighted and need specs," said he, "and if you want to stay on this job you'd better get them quick." I did.

I was sent to fix a lightning conductor on the flagstaff of the central tower of a large drapery shop. They had put up only just enough scaffolding to give me working room, and as the day was blowy, this kept swaying all the time I worked, making it very difficult for me to keep my footing. I heard someone tapping at the bottom of the long ladder, and peering over I saw it was the boss; we called him "Snuffers" as he always had a cold in the nose. He signalled to me that he wanted to come up, so I steadied the ladder as well as I could by lying down flat on the scaffolding. I've always been a light man, and I was lighter then than I am now. He managed to crawl up and in on to my shaky platform, grabbing a hold of my belt to steady himself, and had a look at the copper strip coming from the top of the pole.

"I think it will do," he said, getting a better grip of my belt as the scaffold swayed gaily in a passing blast.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

"Do you want to pull me off the scaffold?" said I.

"No, no, not at all," he replied, "but if we're going we may as well go together."

And, still holding on to me, he crawled towards the ladder and safety. It was cold up there, but my shirt was wringing wet as I parted with the boss.

I left him shortly after to take up a job at the Theatre Royal, then in process of building. It was a Liverpool firm had the contract for the lighting, and it all had to be completed by a fixed day, so we worked every day from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays included. Our wages, instead of being just one week's money, with the overtime we earned, came to double that amount. I saved a tidy little bit during that time, for we had no chance to spend it, and, when the job was finished, I invested it with a friend of mine in a small poultry farm and did not badly out of it. I did not think then that this experiment would lead her, later on, to run an intensive poultry farm in the middle of Essex, with 4,000 birds and incubators holding 1,000 eggs. With a means of living as an electrician settled I was free to devote my energy to what was my real interest—the Ormond Dramatic Society. Each day, from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m., I spent at my electrical work. Then I returned, had some food, and began rehearsals or whatever had to be done for the next show. It was all preparing the way for the Irish National Theatre Society of the future.

END OF PART I.

PART II
THE ABBEY

CHAPTER I

BEFORE starting upon the history of the Abbey Theatre, from which the whole of the great movement now known as the "little theatre" and "community drama" took its origin, there is one point I want to make perfectly clear. I find that most people think of the Abbey Theatre as part and parcel of a national, or rather nationalist movement, that found literary expression in the work of men like W. B. Yeats and "Æ" and was represented in politics by Sinn Fein. They are apt to confuse it with the Irish Literary Theatre, which was dead and buried before the Abbey Theatre had been conceived, much less born. The only connexion between the two was the purely personal one that Mr. Yeats was actively associated with both. The Abbey Theatre's contacts with Sinn Fein were equally slight. We had, it is true, the nominal support of Arthur Griffith, but he was a most uncomfortable ally, and was readier with disparagement (or worse) than praise. He could never forgive us for refusing to subordinate our art to his politics. Another popular error identifies the name of Lady Gregory with the Abbey Theatre in a manner which she, I am sure, would have been the first to disclaim. As an author and director Lady Gregory rendered services of the greatest value, and for technical reasons, as will appear, she was made the nominal patentee; but the real *sage-femme* of the Abbey Theatre, without whose aid it would have been still-born, was Miss Horniman, an Englishwoman who had no concern

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

with Irish literature or politics but only an intense love of the art of the drama. And here now is my great point that can never be sufficiently emphasised. *The Abbey Theatre was first and foremost a theatrical, not a literary movement.* It was the creation not of men of letters but of actors. It is true that it discovered many dramatists of ability and at least one, J. M. Synge, of genius, who, being men of letters, appeal to other men of letters and so have received their full meed of praise, which nobody grudges them. But the playwrights were, so to speak, a supervening phenomenon. It was the zeal of the players that provided the conditions in which they were able to emerge. From time to time I shall have occasion to indicate some analogies between our work and Ibsen's, but these are only incidental and superficial. Fundamentally there is no analogy. On the contrary, the Irish experiment was the exact opposite of the Norwegian. Ibsen made a theatre to suit his plays. We of the Abbey made our theatre first and then got plays to suit it, which, I venture to submit, is the natural order—at any rate it is what the Elizabethans did. We were not literary men. Most of us were humble folk who had to live by hard and humdrum toil—almost, I might say

rude mechanicals
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls.

What bound us together was enthusiasm for the art of acting. If we had been limited by literary or political considerations we might have done some

THE ABBEY

interesting work but we should have remained parochial. We should never have created, as we did, the "community drama."

And now for my story.

In the year 1900, when English companies toured in Ireland, they went only to Cork, Dublin and Belfast, as a rule booking the theatres in that order, and crossing from Belfast to Liverpool or Glasgow, to save on the fares. Most of these tours were managed by star actors like Edward Compton (who did it for thirty years or more), Osmond and Edmund Tearle in Shakespeare, the Kendals, Isabel Bateman and many others. We saw these actor-managers in Dublin generally once a year, and when the London theatres closed we might also have visits from Sir Henry Irving, Sir Herbert Tree, Lewis Waller and those great comedians, Edward Terry and J. L. Toole.

But, although we had thus fair opportunities of seeing first-class acting, we who were enthusiasts for the art of the drama knew its latest developments and experiments only by hearsay. In this connexion we owed much to William Archer, then dramatic critic of the old *Morning Leader*, to whose articles Frank always looked for news of anything important that was happening in the theatre. It was from a long article of Archer's in 1901 that we learned how Ole Bull, the great Norwegian violinist, founded the theatre at Bergen, where Björnstjerne Björnson and Henrik Ibsen served their apprenticeship. This story interested us very much, because there seemed to be a great similarity between the Norway of 1850 and the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Ireland of 1900, both politically and culturally. From Archer also we had news of Antoine's revolt against the Parisian theatre and of his opening the Théâtre Libre in 1887 in Montmartre, where he staged the plays of the moderns and gave the young French writers a chance of being performed though their work was unorthodox in style and useless to the commercial theatre. Antoine's example proved of great service and inspiration to us, for he was not a man of the theatre when he began, but a man engaged in business, and had to try his experiment without capital. He and his company did all the work of production themselves, both clerical and acting, without payment of any kind. They even delivered the tickets by hand to save postage. As the new movement got nearer home, we heard how J. T. Grein and some friends—Miss Horniman was one—initiated in London the Independent Theatre in 1891. The Independent Theatre produced the first Ibsen play to be performed in England and also Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, George Moore's *The Strike at Arlingford* and W. B. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire*. A little later the Stage Society was formed. Contemporary with and cognate to these ventures was the Elizabethan Stage Society, founded by Mr. William Poel.

But with only newspaper reports and articles to help us we could not really find out how the new plays differed from the old. Our first personal experience came with the arrival in Dublin of Sir Herbert Tree with Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. It was an exciting first night. The theatre was full, and I have

THE ABBEY

never seen, before or since, an intelligent audience so completely flabbergasted. They could make neither head nor tail of it. "There were no love-scenes." "There was no hero or heroine." "A play about baths and sewerage." "The ridiculous suggestion that a corporation would act against its own interests or that of the town." "It wasn't a play at all." These were some of the criticisms. But Frank and I were delighted, for our knowledge of plays from the Restoration to our own times enabled us to recognise that this great dramatic genius had broken new ground and blazed a trail that has been followed by every dramatist since his time. We saw that Ibsen had discerned the dramatic possibilities of the lives of every class in the community. In addition, he had invented a new method of construction and had done away with asides and soliloquies. Obviously this kind of play demanded from the actor an entirely new technique. The rhetorical method suited the old comedies, Shakespeare or *The Lady of Lyons*, but would be of as little use in *Pillars of Society* as it would be in Maeterlinck's *Intruder*.

While these changes were taking place in the theatre in England and on the Continent, in Ireland—political agitation having lost a great deal of its appeal to the young men after the death of Parnell—a new interest in Gaelic had sprung from the formation of the Gaelic League in 1893 by a small group of scholars that included Dr. Douglas Hyde, Father Eugene O'Growney, Eoin MacNeill and T. O'Neill Russell. As this league was both non-sectarian and non-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

political, it attracted support from all classes, who gathered together to learn Irish from O'Growney's text-books and, where possible, with the assistance of a native speaker as teacher. They also began to learn jigs and reels and other Irish dances to the music of the bagpipes. No body of this kind could remain in existence in Ireland without sooner or later the political element emerging; and when it did, Douglas Hyde, as President, held the League to its rules, and thereby caused the secession of those who wanted it to be definitely national in the political sense of the word. The secession was led by Arthur Griffith, who formed Cumann na nGaedel, from which came the whole Sinn Fein movement. About the same time there was also a movement to form societies to foster the growth of an Irish literature that would use English as a medium for those who had no Gaelic. Two such societies were established, one in London and one in Dublin, which attracted Irish writers of note in both countries—Lionel Johnson, Katharine Tynan, Alice Milligan, John Todhunter, Stopford Brooke, Standish O'Grady (sometimes called the father of the Irish Literary Revival) and many more. Standish O'Grady whole-heartedly supported them in his periodical, the *All-Ireland Review*. Both societies owed their existence to the initiative and energy of Mr. W. B. Yeats.

These literary activities did not affect humble people like Frank and me very much beyond arousing our interest in their possible influence upon the writing of plays, and presently we were deeply stirred by the

THE ABBEY

announcement of the formation of an Irish Literary Theatre which proposed to give performances in Dublin of Irish plays by Irish authors. The enterprise was to be financed by a guarantee fund provided by sympathisers. Liberal response came from people of all shades of religion and politics, but the guarantors were never called upon. The founders, Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, Edward Martyn and George Moore, managed to make the performances pay their way with some help from the generosity of Martyn.

In those days in Dublin plays could not be performed anywhere but in a theatre that held a patent from the Lord Lieutenant. It was only after much expenditure of time, discussion and badgering of officials that Lady Gregory secured a temporary licence for a play to be given at the Antient Concert Rooms, and so enabled the Irish Literary Theatre to give its first production. The play chosen was *The Countess Cathleen* by W. B. Yeats. It was done by a very efficient London company that included Miss May Whitty (Dame May Webster) and Mr. Ben Webster. The story it tells is how the Countess Cathleen offered her soul to the demons to save her people from famine. Its ethics aroused bitter theological arguments among the audience, which finally became so heated that the police had to be called in. A pamphlet entitled *Souls for Gold* had been printed and circulated before the performance, and the young men of Ireland were called upon to protest against this "insult to their Faith." They did, and from that day every Irish play produced in Dublin had to pass

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

an acid test—Was it “an insult to the Faith” or “a slander on the people of Ireland”? Plays generally failed to pass one or the other; sometimes, as in the case of *The Playboy of the Western World*, both.

In the case of *The Countess Cathleen* the doubts cast on its orthodoxy nearly caused the resignation from the Irish Literary Theatre of Edward Martyn, who was a very devout Roman Catholic; but being reassured on this point he continued his support, and the next production given was his play *The Heather Field*. In the following year the Irish Literary Theatre produced at the Gaiety Theatre three plays—*Maeve* by Edward Martyn, *The Last Feast of Fianna* by Alice Milligan, and *The Bending of the Bough* by George Moore.

The fact that *The Countess Cathleen* was the first Irish play to be seen that was not a melodrama like *The Colleen Bawn* or *The Shaughbraun*, and that it was written by a poet, made Frank and me particularly keen on seeing it. We liked it very much and thought the company gave an excellent performance, one thing being very noticeable—the admirable delivery of Mr. Yeats’ verse, which was not so speakable then as in his later plays, for he had had little experience of writing for the stage. Later he had the Abbey company to experiment with and made *On Baile’s Strand* as easy to speak as any play of Shakespeare’s.

It was this performance of *The Countess Cathleen* that first suggested the idea of the company that eventually became known as the Irish Players. When Frank and I left the hall we were enthusiastic about what we had just seen. We had enough personal

THE ABBEY

experience to be able to allow for the loss the play suffered through having its production on a "fit-up" stage and in a hall that was not intended for dramatic entertainment. Yet even so there seemed to be something missing. What was it? Then it suddenly flashed upon me that what was wrong with the performance was that, though the artists were most efficient, they were not Irish. To get the full value of this play one must have native actors. The atmosphere it required could only be created by actors who had a natural understanding and feeling for the theme. Frank quite agreed with me, but he very pertinently asked, "Where in Ireland could you get any company of actors that could compete with those we have just seen? Those who had made reputations by playing Boucicault and J. W. Whitbread would be useless in a play like *The Countess Cathleen*. It would need an Irish company as capable as Edward Compton's or F. R. Benson's English ones to give the interpretation that such a play demands if it is to be a success." To which I could only say, "Yes, and if there is ever to be a real Irish theatre the first thing we need will be a trained company of Irish actors. But where are they to come from?" It did not occur to either of us just then that we had in the Ormond Dramatic Society something like the nucleus of such a company.

Meanwhile Arthur Griffith's Cumann na nGaedéal, was busy with propaganda for the Sinn Féin movement which was to abolish and supersede the Irish Parliamentary Party in national politics. There was a powerful women's section called *Inginide na*

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

hÉireann (the daughters of Erin), under the presidency of Maud Gonne with Maire T. Quinn as her able first lieutenant. Frank became deeply interested in this movement. We met Arthur Griffith and Miss Gonne, and when they wanted some Irish plays produced at one of their concerts I was asked if I would take the matter in hand. I readily agreed and thus had the honour of directing the first public performance of a play in Gaelic. It was *Tobar Draoidheachta* (*The Magic Well*) by Father Dineen. This experience was the means of bringing me into intimate contact with the Literary Theatre when, the following year, they again took the Gaiety Theatre for the purpose of producing *Diarmuid and Grania* by George Moore and W. B. Yeats. It was to be played by F. R. Benson's company and to be preceded by Douglas Hyde's *Casad an Sugan* (*The Twisting of the Rope*) performed by Irish amateurs—the first Gaelic play ever seen on a regular stage. Mr. Moore had intended to produce this play himself, but he found his experience in dealing with professional actors in London of little use in coaching the Gaelic-speaking amateurs supplied by the League. Indeed it was, if anything, a hindrance, and so he finally sent for me to know if I would take over the job, which I was very glad to do. My knowledge of Gaelic was not extensive, but my experience of producing amateurs was, and, with Dr. Hyde to help me, I knew I could manage. I got all the actors to speak their lines in English first while I gave them the business and the positions. When they had got these right we turned the play back into Gaelic and in this

THE ABBEY

way put it together bit by bit. It was all a valuable experience for me because it proved that, given the good-will of the actors, I could get the same acting value out of the play whether it was spoken in English or in Gaelic. Apart from my own production I had to give what help I could to the members of Mr. Benson's company, who were sadly worried with trying to find out who historically were the people in *Diarmuid and Grania* and how to pronounce the Gaelic names. There were three or four different pronunciations of Diarmuid, and Grania developed into Graw-niar or Grainyah. I told them what I knew of the story of the elopement of Fergus' wife, but I don't think they felt very happy about it. I came away from the rehearsals more convinced than ever that these plays, if they were to be successful, must be played by Irish actors. Sir James Barrie's play *What Every Woman Knows* becomes a new play when produced with an entirely Scots company.

The event that was immediately responsible for the formation of the first company of Irish actors was, as often happens, something that at first sight seemed to have no relation to it. One day Standish O'Grady's *All Ireland Review* published two acts of a play called *Deirdre* by a writer signing himself "Æ," which we found afterwards was the signature under which George Russell always wrote. A friend of Frank's, James Cousins, drew his attention to it, and Frank bought a copy and gave it to me. *Deirdre* was the first play about the greatest story in *The Three Sorrows of Story-telling*—the history of Deirdre and the sons of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Usna. It was beautifully written in a lyrical prose that was easy to speak. I said to Frank, "Here is an Irish play that I would not mind trying to produce with our Ormond Dramatic Society." For there was nothing very difficult about the acting, nothing that teaching could not get over. The trouble was that the play was unfinished. Where was the third act? Frank called on Mr. Russell and told him how anxious we were to produce the play, if only we had the whole of it. Mr. Russell was very amiable, but rather disconcerting. He said he was not greatly interested in the theatre, and in writing *Deirdre* he had been actuated only by curiosity to see what the great Irish epic would look like in dramatic form. Having written two acts he couldn't for the life of him think what the third was to be. Frank was rather taken aback. However, he suggested, and "Æ" agreed, that I should be called in, as I had some experience of acting and a good deal of knowledge of play construction. This resulted in my first meeting with the great poet and mystic at his house at Rathgar. I confess I found him a backward subject. He threw cold water on the idea of producing *Deirdre*. He had no knowledge, he said, of the technique of the playwright and had never dreamed of writing with a view to production. But I was pertinacious. I said, "We want to produce your play if you will let us," and I told him that we would get together a company of Irish actors to play it. I argued with immense earnestness and all the eloquence in my power—and even the most halting Irishman has some eloquence—that if he had enough

THE ABBEY

material for two good acts a man of his genius could not fail to find enough for a scenario for a third act.

Whether it was my persuasions or his goodness of heart I know not, but the interview ended with "Æ" promising to think the matter over and see what could be done. That was good enough for us. We felt so confident that the play would be finished and given to us that we began forthwith to consider the manner of production. It was quite a new style of play for us to handle. For one thing it needed far more staging than anything else we had done, and that would cost money. Frank said he was good for five pounds and I offered to find the same amount. So we had a whole ten pounds with which to start producing the first big Irish play with an all-Irish cast! But what is money, especially in Ireland? A much more serious question was where the play was to be performed when it was ready. Frank had an idea that the committee of St. Teresa's Temperance Society would lend their hall, seeing that we had given a good many shows from time to time to help them to get the funds to build it. He wrote to them accordingly. The St. Teresa's Temperance Society turned out to be not ungrateful. They offered us the hall for three nights gratis as well as the use of it for rehearsals. This was a godsend, for I had no place where I could make and paint the scenery, and I could not afford to hire a room. We got our little company together. We read the play to them and they were as enthusiastic as we were. But here another trouble arose. The cast of *Deirdre* was a larger one than we had ever

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

had before. Hence I formed a new society *ad hoc*, called W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company, and, with Dudley Digges, P. J. Kelly, C. Caulfield, Frank and myself, we managed to enlist Maire T. Quinn, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, Padraic Colum, J. Cousins, F. Ryan and Brian Callender to make up the tale.

While waiting for the third act to be brought forth in the fullness of time by "Æ," we went on with Acts I and II, rehearsing them at the Coffee Palace in Townsend Street. There we had the advantage of a stage, which is always better than a mere floor. In a week or two "Æ" came along with the last act written, which was every bit as good as the others. Our joy was complete. From then onwards he often came down to rehearsals, sitting away back in the hall wrapped up in a brown greatcoat, smoking his pipe, and helping us with useful suggestions all the time. When I had a half-hour to spare I bought timber and canvas and began at the St. Teresa's hall to build the scenery. While the first rehearsals were in progress Frank met Lady Gregory, Mr. Yeats and Miss Gonne, and told them what we were trying to do. When Mr. Yeats heard of it he kindly promised that if *Deirdre* was not long enough he would give us a new one-act play he had just finished, called *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, which he had first written for Miss Gonne. When *Deirdre* had settled down enough for the playing time to be judged, it turned out to be, as Mr. Yeats had anticipated, much too short for a full evening's programme. And so Mr. Yeats not only let us have *Kathleen ni*



WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Photo Topical Press

THE ABBEY

Houlihan but persuaded Miss Gonne to take the title part as well. Our cup now ran over, for, as president of *Inginide na hÉireann*, Miss Gonne was in fact what *Kathleen ni Houlihan* was in symbol. Never again will there be such a splendid *Kathleen* as she; a beautiful tall woman with her great masses of golden hair and her voice that would charm the birds off the bough. Her promised appearance assured us of the support not only of her own society but of *Cumann na nGaedéal* as well. It was under the auspices of Miss Gonne's society that our performance was formally given.

The scenery for *Kathleen* did not present any great difficulty, but when it came to *Deirdre* it was far out of my line. I saw "Æ" and left the design for the scenes and costumes entirely in his hands. Like all very busy men he always had time. He said if I would get the scenery made and show him how to use distemper he would do the painting himself. His friend, Miss Helen Laird, undertook to see his designs for the costumes carried out, provided we supplied the material and the labour. An application to Maire T. Quinn put the strength of the Daughters of Erin at our disposal until the costumes were finished. "Æ" and I painted scenery as hard as two men could, at the hall in Clarendon Street, I thanking my stars that it was all being done on the stage where it was to be used, so that there would be no time lost in making alterations at the dress-rehearsal.

At last everything was ready. We gave three performances of both plays. Here is the programme :

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

INGINIDE NA H-ÉIREANN

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday Evenings,
2nd, 3rd and 4th April, 1902.

Mr. W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company
will produce at
the Hall of St. Teresa's Total Abstinence Association,
Clarendon Street,
for the first time on any stage,

DEIRDRE

a play in three acts by "Æ"

and

KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

a play in one act by W. B. YEATS.

Scenery by "Æ" and W. G. Fay.

Dresses made by Inginide na hÉireann from designs by
"Æ."

Orchestra String band of the Workmen's Club, 41 York
Street.

And here are the casts :

DEIRDRE

DEIRDRE	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn
LAVARCAM	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh
FERGUS	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly
BUINNE	} <i>Sons of Fergus</i>	.	.	{	P. Colum
ILLAUN					C. Caulfield
ARDAN	} <i>Sons of Usna</i>	.	.	{	F. Ryan
AINLE					H. Sproule (J. Cousins)
NAISI					J. Dudley Digges
MESSENGER	.	.	.	.	Brian Callender
CONCOBAR ARDRIE of Ulla	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay

THE ABBEY

Act I. The Dun of Deirdre's Captivity at Emain Macha.

Act II. In Alba, Naisi's Dun on the banks of Loch Ettive.

Act III. The House of the Red Branch at Emain Macha.

KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN . . .	Miss Maud Gonne
DELIA CAHEL . . .	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh
BRIDGET GILLAN . . .	Maire T. Quinn
PATRICK GILLAN . . .	C. Caulfield
MICHAEL GILLAN . . .	J. Dudley Digges
PETER GILLAN . . .	W. G. Fay

Scene. A Farmer's kitchen close to Killala in 1798.

This production of *Deirdre* was the beginning of a movement that not only created a native drama in Ireland, but afterwards stimulated both Scotland and Wales to follow our example. It gave to the Gael that which had never before existed in the history of the race—a means of expressing the national consciousness through the medium of the drama.

CHAPTER II

THE success of the plays was instantaneous. Nothing like them had ever been seen in Dublin. We could have played to the capacity of the hall for another week if circumstances, financial and otherwise, had permitted. Our audiences were drawn largely from the working classes (who in every country make the best theatrical audiences because they come to the theatre to be entertained and not to digest their dinners). They were enthusiastic. Their joy was a delight to see. They loved the patriotic sentiment of *Kathleen*, while the romance of *Deirdre* was so beautiful and novel that they hardly knew how to express their feelings. All this was as surprising as it was gratifying, for we had assumed that our audiences would be entirely composed of those who had always supported us, instead of which we discovered a public, and a large public, that wanted what we could give them—plays about Ireland written by Irishmen and performed by Irishmen. The thought was so encouraging that Frank suggested we should try to keep the little company together and rehearse during the summer months. Our main difficulty was the usual one. We had no funds. The example of Antoine was quoted. If he could manage it in Paris surely we could do the same in Dublin by pooling our resources. A meeting was called of all those that were interested in trying to form an Irish National Theatre. The activities of the Irish Literary Theatre Society had recently come to an end, so there was nobody in the field but

THE ABBEY

ourselves. If we did nothing the whole idea would have to wait for a more favourable opportunity which might never come. After some more meetings had been held and the whole subject discussed from every angle it was decided to form a society to be called the Irish National Theatre Society, with "Æ" as our president and Miss Gonne and Dr. Douglas Hyde as vice-presidents. But "Æ" shrank from the position we proposed for him. He repeated that he had but little interest in the theatre, and urged us to approach Mr. Yeats as the only man who stood for anything that mattered in connexion with Irish plays. Mr. Yeats agreed to be our president, and hence, from the first production of the Irish Literary Theatre down to the present day, he has been the head and guiding influence of the Irish Theatre. Our society was accordingly constituted as follows: President: W. B. Yeats; Vice-presidents: Maud Gonne, George Russell and Douglas Hyde; Stage Manager: W. G. Fay; Secretary: Fred Ryan. The members were Maire T. Quinn, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, Helen Laird, F. J. Fay, J. Dudley Digges, P. J. Kelly, Seumas O'Sullivan, George Roberts, T. Keohle, J. H. Cousins, Padraic Colum, Harry Norman and Frank Walker. Later Miss Gonne's political work became so exacting that in September 1903 she regretfully retired.

It is a fairly easy thing to form a society, especially in Ireland, but much more difficult to find it a home when the only rent one can afford is a nominal one. I searched Dublin north, south, east and west, and at last found in Lower Camden Street a very small hall

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in a woeful state of dilapidation which the landlord was prepared to let for £40 a year. I took it there and then, making myself personally responsible for the rent without any means of paying it beyond a pious hope that it would materialise from some unknown quarter when it became due. The place was just four bare walls and a roof, without platform or seats. It was our job to make what we needed. With the aid of a carpenter and of any members who were anxious for a little hard work in the evenings, we set to. We built a stage and some scenery of a very primitive kind which I painted myself on Sundays. The seating was a sore worry, because seating is very expensive. However, someone remembered a foundry where they made the castings for school benches. We bought five dozen of these, and with thick flooring boards for the seats and thin ones for the backs, by expending much labour and time we provided enough seating to accommodate the audiences of our hopes. The hall became a great meeting-place for all sorts of people interested in any of the Irish revival societies. They came, sometimes to lend a hand with the work, but more often to sit round and talk among themselves and—when they thought of it—tell us how to do it. Anyhow we never suffered from lonesomeness. The stage was an even worse problem than the seating, because I could not make it any more than nine feet deep by sixteen feet wide from wall to wall, out of which, as there were no dressing-rooms, I had to leave room at the sides for the actors to make up—one side for the women and the other for the men.

THE ABBEY

Heating at the time was quite out of the question. All we could hope for was that by the time the weather grew really cold we might be able to afford a gas-stove. While the hall was being put into order we rehearsed the plays for the opening performance, either at the Coffee Palace or at the hall if it happened to be free.

In December 1902 we opened for three nights with a play on municipal politics, *The Laying of the Foundations*, by our secretary, Fred Ryan; a new one-act comedy, *A Pot of Broth*, by Mr. Yeats (which was for a long time the stand-by of the society); *The Racing Lug*, by James Cousins; and a play in Gaelic by P. T. McGinley called *Eilis agus an bean deirce* (*Eilis and the Beggar Woman*).

It was not a very successful opening. After the reception of *Deirdre* we expected more than we got. The hall was cold and so was the audience, if you could call the few that turned up an audience. The roof leaked. The stage was so small that you couldn't swing a kitten, let alone a cat. On the Saturday night we had trouble in getting our audience into the hall. The shops on either side of our entrance were a provision dealer on the left and a butcher on the right. Saturday being their busy day, large boxes of eggs encroached upon our entrance on the one side, while the butcher crowded the other with the half of a large cow that nearly touched the egg boxes. The result was that those members of the public who were courageous enough to support us had to get in by slipping sideways between the eggs and the beef.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

One lady remarked to her escort as she slithered past the carcase: "Well, ye told me that Mr. Yeats was queer, but this is the queerest theatre that ever I saw." The Press was rough and rude. One man wrote to the newspapers complaining that we did not give him upholstered fauteuils! "Why," he exclaimed indignantly, "should the Muse of Irish Drama hold her levee in surroundings that would spell bankruptcy for a penny gaff? Why should she declaim from a stage which is not a stage, surrounded with scenery which is not scenery (one for me who had painted it!), to an audience that is cultivating rheumatism or pains in the spinal column on seats that have no backs? I may be told it is classic simplicity. I answer it is merely downright commonplace discomfort, which not even a red-hot enthusiast would endure for long. . . . If simplicity of scenery and dress be the object they should endeavour to follow the example set in the production of *Everyman*. [William Poel had spent £2,000 on this "simplicity."] To put it plainly, Sir, if there is ever to be a national theatre, its promoters must remember the dignity of dramatic literature and the comfort of the playgoing public." And so on for a column and a half, but it all boiled down to "Can any good come out of Lower Camden Street?" At the time I thought the man was right, and I would have given him comfort if I could. Now I think he was wrong and we were right; for, instead of waiting until time and circumstances brought us proper conditions, we were content to suffer all manner of inconvenience and abuse provided we got on with the

THE ABBEY

work, which was what mattered. In England there is a periodical agitation for a national theatre, but it always includes a plan for a house costing about a hundred thousand pounds and an endowment of about the same amount. Yet if ever the money is subscribed it will not make a national theatre. Such institutions are the result of growth and tradition that no money can buy any more than it can buy an Oxford or a Cambridge.

Early in January (1903) we did the same programme at Rathmines for Cumann na nGaedéal at their Samhain festival, where we also gave a revival of *Deirdre* and *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. This occasion, though we little dreamed it at the time, was to be the turning-point of our fortunes, as I shall tell presently. We tried only one more production at Camden Street — *The Sleep of the King*, by James H. Cousins, an interesting play and the last we had from him. It was clear that we could make no progress without larger premises and better equipment. Neither actors nor plays had a chance in such a cramped space. And so we decided to hire the Molesworth Hall for our productions. We hoped to take enough at each production to cover the expenses of the next and also the rent of the Camden Street premises, which we kept on for meetings and rehearsals.

It was just about the same time that one of our staunchest supporters, the late Lord Monteaigle, asked if we could bring a one-act play to his place at Foynes, Co. Limerick, where the Social Improvement Society was giving an entertainment. The only play I

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

could think of as suitable was *A Pot of Broth*. For one thing, I could not find more than three people free to go down to the country at that time of year, and in any case the *Pot* was straight, farcical comedy, a regular side-splitter such as a village audience might be counted upon to enjoy. So one Saturday afternoon Maire T. Quinn, P. J. Kelly and myself got to Foynes. The village hall was crowded. Our bosoms swelled with pride, patriotic and artistic. Dublin had been all very well, but it was only a metropolitan mob, whereas now we were making our début before the real Irish people, the people of the land. It was a great occasion. The entertainment began with a couple of songs, which were enthusiastically applauded, and then came our *Pot of Broth*. It is a very little piece, playing only fifteen minutes, but those fifteen minutes at Foynes felt like the hideous eternity of a bad dream. From start to finish stony silence—not a murmur, not even the ghost of a smile. There was no curtain call. We were holding an inquest to find out how the play had been killed (our gloom deepened by the sound of the applause that greeted the singers who followed us), when in comes my Lord Monteaagle to ask could we do another turn, as the night was still young.

“We’ve only the one play,” I said, “and they didn’t like it.”

“What do you mean?” said he.

“They never laughed,” said I.

“Oh, is that all?” said his Lordship. “Don’t you know that probably not one of them ever saw a

THE ABBEY

play before? And besides, they'd be thinking it was disrespectful to laugh at the swell actors from Dublin."

At that I had an idea. I asked how it would be if I went in front of the curtain and told them the plot—the story of the foolish woman who bought a stone to make broth with—then we would play it all over again. Lord Monteagle thought that was splendid. They would just love it, he said. So I went out and told them, and up went the curtain again. This time we had no cause for complaint. They laughed at every line, whether it was funny or not. The scene at the fall of the curtain was tremendous. I felt like Napoleon at Marengo, when he lost in the morning and won in the afternoon. How many actors can boast of having played the same play to the same audience twice in the same night—and the second time after getting the bird at the first?

We opened at the Molesworth Hall in March, presenting for the first time Mr. Yeats's morality, *The Hour-glass*, and Lady Gregory's first play, *Twenty-five*. To make up a full evening's programme Mr. Yeats expounded our dramatic theories in a lecture on "The Reform of the Theatre" between the two plays. *The Hour-glass* was the first modern morality play, and for simplicity, dignity and dramatic force it can bear comparison with any of the Chester or Coventry Mysteries. It is easy to stage. The only problem we had was how to dress Miss Nic Shiubhlaigh for the part of the Angel. As an Irishman I may be forgiven for saying that angels on the stage are the very devil. They are so apt to look like pantomime

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

fairies. Mr. Yeats finally decided to have her dressed like a Botticelli angel, with a golden halo round her head—quite frankly a picture angel. I arranged an entrance that enabled her to reduce her movements to a minimum, and she played the part with a sincerity that suited her austere beauty. Dudley Digges had the requisite power and detachment needed for the Wise Man, and Frank gave the Fool all the whimsicality that made him so fine in that kind of part. As the Wise Man's Wife Maire Quinn had an unsympathetic part but played it well. The pupils were Seumas O'Sullivan, Padraic Colum, P. J. Kelly and P. Mac Shiubhlaigh (Frank Walker), and the Wise Man's children were played by Eithne and Padragan Nic Shiubhlaigh.

Twenty-five, in which Miss Dora Hackett made her first appearance, is a valiant attempt to get a mixture of sentiment and comedy into a very short play. It was the first of its kind that we did, and it was very successful. Mr. Yeats's lecture was a plea for simplification in everything connected with the theatre and for concentration upon clear elocution. I wish he would give that lecture again. It is badly needed to-day, when nobody seems to mind whether actors are audible or not. There are a few of the older actors who can speak both intelligently and intelligibly, but apart from them one seldom hears the lines of a play spoken with any knowledge or appreciation of the psychological background of the spoken word.

Our move to a better hall had an immediate result in, I will not say a more sympathetic, but a more

THE ABBEY

respectful attitude on the part of the Press. Now the newspapers began to take our work seriously. It is true that most of the critics were anxious that we should drop all new methods of play-acting and play-writing and make a point of appealing to the man in the street by copying what had been found successful in the ordinary theatre—in other words, that we should go on grinding out the good old tunes. None the less they helped to make the public aware of our existence.

I now come to the unforeseen and fateful result of our performance for Cumann na nGaedel. The Secretary of the London Irish Literary Society, Mr. Stephen Gwynn (then M.P. for Galway City), happened to be in Dublin at the time, and came to see our show. He was so impressed that when he returned to London he persuaded his Society to offer to provide a hall in London for a performance and pay all our expenses. Had it not been for this chance, which we eagerly took, we should not have been seen in London for another ten years or more. The Irish Theatre owes an eternal debt of gratitude to Mr. Gwynn. But it was one thing to say we would go to London and another to be able to go. Not many of us could get free to travel at that time of year. We had our jobs, and it was far too early for holidays. The most we could hope for was to get a whole Saturday off, and that in the end was how the great affair was managed. It was arranged that on Saturday, May 2nd, 1903, we should give an afternoon and an evening performance at the Queen's Gate Hall, South Kensington. The news of our forth-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

coming adventure caused some wagging of tongues in Dublin. It was not a conspicuously friendly wagging either. Much of it was facetious and not a little of it malicious. Arthur Griffith in his journal was at pains to pontificate that he could "assure Mr. W. G. Fay that the fact of his taking his company to London would not make the slightest difference to our opinion of him and them." On Friday night, May 1st, by considerable exercise of tact we managed to get the whole company down to the mail-boat at Kingstown, and we reached London very tired and sleepy on the Saturday morning. Never in my life have I had to work so hard and at such frantic speed. The rest of us did have time to draw a few breaths before the matinée, but for me there was not much dallying over breakfast. I had to be off to the Queen's Gate Hall to see that everything was in order, and also, mark you, to rehearse two strange actors! True, they were very little ones—little Miss Gwynn and Master Geoffrey Dearmer, who were to play the children's parts in *The Hour-glass*, for it was impossible to bring our own children over from Dublin—but it was important to have them right. However, the two performances went swimmingly. (I might say the same about our heads when all was over.) At the matinee we gave *The Hour-glass*, *Twenty-five* and *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, and in the evening *The Laying of the Foundations*, *A Pot of Broth* and *Kathleen* again. On both occasions the audiences were large and seemed to like us, but that was all we knew when our weary bodies got back to Dublin on the Sunday night.

It was not until the London newspapers arrived on

THE ABBEY

Monday night and Tuesday morning that the dazzling, the unimaginable truth was revealed. We had achieved the most signal dramatic success that London had known for many a year. We had hoped for an appreciative paragraph here and there. Instead we found our performances described and discussed by the column in every London daily paper, morning and evening. Not one but had sent its critic to the Queen's Gate Hall, and there wasn't a discordant voice in the full chorus of praise. Different writers, of course, had different points of view, and sometimes they were a little bit at sea about what we were after; but they were unanimous that our work marked an epoch in the history of the English-speaking theatre, if not indeed of the European theatre. That William Archer should appreciate us was not, on the whole, surprising; but, cordial as he was, it was not his voice but A. B. Walkley's that led the service of praise, and it did so with an emphasis that was staggering. In particular he was impressed by the power of our people "to stand still and not do any fussy movements when they are not speaking. They just stay where they are and listen. When they move it is without premeditation, at haphazard, and even with a little natural clumsiness as of people who are not conscious of being stared at in public. Hence a delightful effect of spontaneity; and in their demeanour they have the artless impulsiveness of children." Generous as the other critics were, Walkley, I think, was the only one who had the wit to see immediately what Frank and I were driving at—not, of course, in the purely peasant pieces but in the serious and poetic plays, viz. to enforce

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

the most rigid economy of gesture and movement, to make the speaking quite abstract, and at the same time to keep a music in it by having all the voices harmonised.

At the end of the week the English weekly reviews—and in those spacious days there were a good many of them—took up the tale, dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the daily Press. And hardly less than the Press opinions did we value the enthusiastic letters that came to us from writers like "Michael Field" and Arthur Symons. The latter wrote: "I admired and enjoyed the performance of your company. . . . I need not tell you how entirely I sympathise with your general principles. The quietude and simplicity of the whole thing; the beautiful speaking and, in the case of your brother, a real genius for acting which seems rather an instinct than an art. That means, of course, that he is a fine artist . . . it seems almost the first time I have ever seen a company in love with the words they spoke. There is no doubt you are doing the right thing in the right way."

The hardest of all life's hard tasks is to persevere in some work that you believe to be right and true, while all the time you are surrounded by people who despise, even hate it, and try by every means in their power to hinder you. And then, perhaps from the quarter you least expect it, you find not only sympathy but what is better, understanding of what you are trying to do. That is the stuff to hearten you to go on to the end against every obstacle. Our visit to London showed

THE ABBEY

Frank and me that at least we were on the right road, however long it might prove to be.

The Irish National Theatre now had its tail up properly, and the discomfiture of the Dublin newspaper men and other local wiseacres at finding they could no longer patronise or sneer was an amusing spectacle—very soothing, as Mr. Pecksniff would say. During that auspicious summer we were given two interesting country engagements both by people who, like ourselves, were trying to do honest cultural work for Ireland. The first was Miss Gleeson, of Dun Emer, Dundrum, who, assisted by Mr. Yeats's sisters, was making a gallant attempt to establish home industries and fine book-printing. It was in the paddock at Dun Emer that we gave our first open-air performance. *Deirdre* was the play. It proved to be peculiarly suitable for open-air performance, and luckily we had fine weather. Our other invitation came from the Administrator of Loughrea Cathedral, Father O'Donovan. He badly needed funds for the completion of the Cathedral, which it was his ambition to make as completely a native creation as possible, instead of the usual rubbishy product imported from Germany. He took endless pains to get native craftsmen and native sculptors for the furnishings, and in the end produced the first really Irish church that has been built in the land for centuries. Poor man, he got little enough thanks—nothing but sour words from the clergy and sour looks from the laity. I am glad to think that with our new prestige we were able to draw a house packed to every corner and so made a substantial contribution to his building fund.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING back on it all, I can hardly believe how quickly events marched in 1903. It was truly our *annus mirabilis*. We had begun it in a dire poverty that made us the laughing-stocks of Dublin, and you have to be a Dubliner to know how cruel that was. In those first days we were made to feel the force of the ancient sage's words that the hardest thing about poverty is that it makes people laugh at you. Yet within six months of our beggarly beginnings we had performed in London and been acclaimed as masters and pioneers in our art by all the most eminent critics. In the autumn we revealed an Irish dramatist, whose work now belongs not to Ireland but to the world, and discovered the greatest Irish actress since Peg Woffington; and, to crown all, Miss Horniman paid her first visit to Dublin.

The actress was Sara Allgood, then a mere girl, who came to us to play the Princess Buan in Mr. Yeats's new play, *The King's Threshold*, which was to be part of our autumn programme. We had one other new item, called *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The author's name, John Millington Synge, conveyed nothing to us or anybody else at that time. All we knew was that he was a Wicklow man, a graduate of Trinity College, whom Mr. Yeats had discovered a few years before in Paris, living pretty miserably by odds and ends of reviewing and now and then fiddling in an orchestra. Mr. Yeats had told him that he would never do any good in Paris. If he wanted to

THE ABBEY

make a name in letters, as he apparently did, let him pack off to the Aran Islands and study the stuff of life there; and with surprising docility off Synge packed. Thenceforward Aran was his home. He seems to have found life there interesting rather than enjoyable, and it is doubtful if either his spirit or his body could have borne it had he not been able to spend a substantial part of each year in Paris. However, it was in Aran that he found his *métier*, as Mr. Yeats had prophesied. *In the Shadow of the Glen* was his first effort, but it showed little sign of the 'prentice hand. It was a peasant play, but oh, how different from any of our other peasant pieces! It was the first of the modern Irish realistic plays. From beginning to end there was not a syllable of sentiment. The dialect used was entirely strange to us, which was hardly surprising seeing that Synge had invented it himself. His device was the simple enough one of translating practically word for word from Gaelic. It has been imitated often since—notably by Mr. Caradoc Evans for broad comic effects in his Welsh satires—but it was new then, and to me as producer it presented a serious problem. I was quite at home with the traditional "stage Irish" of the "arrah," "begob" and "bedad" school, as well as the stage Irish of O'Keefe, Boucicault and Whitbread. I knew the Irish of Lever and Lover and, what is better and more correct, the dialect used in Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasant*. It was all the more disconcerting for me to encounter an Irish dialect that I could not speak "trippingly on the tongue."

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

The droll thing was that neither could Synge speak it! In time I mastered it, but he never did—perhaps partly because his years abroad had removed every trace of brogue from his speech—though he could always check it when he heard it spoken. He came to Dublin for the rehearsals—a tawny, thick-set fellow with the head of a lion and a terrifying moustache, and looking at least forty though actually he was just turned thirty-two. He and I soon got together and experimented with the dialogue until, after much hard practice, I got at how the speeches were built up, and could say any of the lines exactly in the way he wanted. They had what I call a balance of their own, and went with a kind of lilt: “she had the lightest hand . . . at making a cake . . . or milking a cow . . . that wouldn’t be aisy.” Once I had found out the proper “tune” I never had any difficulty with the dialect in any of his other plays.

Synge always finished a play in his mind to the last detail before he started writing it down, and once it was on paper he could not alter it. I remember asking him once if he did not think that a certain speech might be improved. He replied, “I quite agree, but these were the words he used and I only set them down.” He told me that as the play came into being in his imagination the characters took on a life of their own and said and did things without consulting him at all. It is a fact that you cannot cut a line in any of his plays without damaging the whole structure. His power of visualisation was perfect. I would work out a scale plan of the stage and furniture, and

THE ABBEY

he would say, "That is just the way I saw the room as I was writing the play." It was very lucky that there seemed to be a sort of pre-established harmony between my mind and his, for I always wanted to produce his plays as nearly as possible as he saw them. If I asked him, "Was Dan standing where he is on the right, behind the table, when he said these lines?" he would say, "No, he was on the right-hand side of the table with his hand on it." He was a great joy to work with, for he had a keen sense of humour and plenty of patience, and above all he knew what he wanted, and when he got it said so—which is a virtue very rare in dramatic authors.

It was during his first visit to Inishmaan, the middle island of Aran, that old Pat Dirane told him the story of *In the Shadow of the Glen*, relating it as if it had happened to himself one dark night ten miles from Dublin. Who can say where the story came from originally? We afterwards discovered three other versions of it in different parts of the country. Perhaps it is not Irish at all in origin, but a mediæval folk tale wafted from the Continent to our shores—for folk tales are like thistledown for travelling—during the Middle Ages. This is suggested by the closing passage of old Pat's version, which ran thus: "She went into the bedroom, but the divil a bit of her came back. Then the dead man got up and he took one stick; he gave me the other to myself. We went in and saw them lying together with her head on his arm. The dead man hit him a blow with his stick, so that the blood of him leapt up and hit the gallery." Synge

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and I were always puzzled to know how that word gallery got into the story. You don't find galleries in Irish cottages, but you might find something of the sort in a peasant's house in the south of Europe. Is the inference that the story came to us from, say, Italy and was being told by the country folk in the days of Boccaccio?

In the Shadow of the Glen provoked a hurricane of abuse which, bad as it was, was no more than a foretaste of what was in store for us and the author in later days and was to attain the most extravagant heights of foolishness and violence with the production of *The Playboy of the Western World*. The treatment meted out to Synge during his lifetime might well have stirred the rest of the world to wonder if Irishmen really had any sense of humour. A possible explanation of this peculiar obtuseness, this complete inability to appreciate satire except when it is directed at other nations, is that, until our movement forced one upon them, the Gaels never had a theatre of their own and therefore little understanding of the functions and values of the stage. They had not the needful sophistication to accept a play as a play and leave it at that. Instead of being convulsed with laughter at the stark comedy of *In the Shadow of the Glen* they were convulsed with what Oscar Wilde calls "the rage of Caliban at seeing his own face in the glass." Of course, as usual, Mr. Yeats had to bear the brunt of the attack, for whatever we did he was sure to get the chief blame, but the rest of us got our fair share. We were told that there were no Irish people like those in Synge's



W. G. FAY, the Tramp in "In the Shadow of the Glen"

THE ABBEY

play. Arthur Griffith in the *United Irishman* played us a peculiarly dirty trick. Somehow—by whose treachery or carelessness we never discovered—he managed to get hold of a script, and did not wait for the play to be produced, but opened his attack beforehand. The points of objection taken were—"There are no loveless marriages in Ireland." "No one could be found in Ireland like the characters in this play." "It is a crude version, pretending to be Irish, of the famous or infamous story of the Widow of Ephesus." There was a monotonous similarity about all the comments, but I can't help giving one or two more. "A Boccaccio story masquerading as an Irish play." "Men and women in Ireland marry lacking love, and live mostly on a dull level of amity. Sometimes the woman dies of a broken heart, but she does not go away with the tramp." "As will be seen, the play is an evil compound of Ibsen and Boucicault."

It took many years for Ireland to learn—if indeed she has yet learned—that in J. M. Synge she had produced a great dramatist. During all my time the majority of the Irish Press were bitterly hostile and the audiences were not much better.

As if things had not been bad enough, I must needs make them worse by committing a frightsome political *gaffe* and with no more intention than the babe unborn. We had a message from Dublin Castle that the Chief Secretary for Ireland, the late George Wyndham, himself a man of letters of repute, was bringing a party of six to the show, and would we kindly reserve seats? As the Molesworth Hall did not boast any

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

special accommodation for distinguished visitors, I searched all the other rooms in the building for some presentable armchairs, and got together a mixed lot to the required number, which I placed in the front row, quite pleased to think that we had done our best to show due courtesy. Next day, to my horror, I read in the Press that the chair I had allotted to the Chief Secretary was upholstered in RED!—"England's cruel red." What a scandal, what an outrage! The director of a so-called Irish National Theatre not only ministering to the posterior comfort of "the base, brutal and bloody Saxon," but also obsequiously and abominably displaying an emblem of the vile tyranny that he represented. My patriotic stock slumped at once to nigh nothing, and I don't think it has ever looked up much to this day.

I was so weighed down with my own woes that I hadn't any sympathy to spare for the mishap that befell poor George Roberts, who played the part of old Dan Burke, and very well too. In fact I welcomed it as comic relief. At that time we were still too poor to afford such an expensive luxury as wigs, so aged characters had to dust their heads well with cornflour—this being the cheapest way of imitating grey hair before shampoo powder was invented. I instructed George how to spread it well over his head with a large powder puff, and with the help of the other boys he managed to get his reddish hair fairly disguised and looked quite old and withered. Next day I met him in the street looking very queer. When I looked at him closer I saw he had had his head shaved. "What's

THE ABBEY

the matter, George?" said I. He told me. When he had gone to remove his make-up he tried to get the cornflour out of his hair with hot water—an error of judgment that obliged him to go to bed with a head like an apple-dumpling. I had to buy him a wig after that.

It was something to be thankful for that Mr. Yeats's piece, *The King's Threshold*, was void of offence. It is a long one-act play on the old story of the poet who goes on hunger-strike to compel the king to grant a petition. It was a noticeable advance upon *The Countess Cathleen* in the art of writing verse that is to be spoken, and as Seanchan, the chief poet of Ireland, Frank had one of the best parts he ever had while we were with the Society, as it gave him great opportunities alike as a speaker of verse and a character actor. However, the production of *The King's Threshold* is chiefly memorable as the occasion that brought over to Dublin the lady whose subsequent interest in our little Society made it possible for an Irish theatre to be established in Dublin on a permanent basis in a home of its own. Miss Horniman had known Mr. Yeats in London, where for some time she had acted as his secretary; and it had been through her famous pioneer adventure at the old Avenue Theatre that he had his first dramatic production, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. She had seen and admired our performances at the Queen's Gate Hall, and on hearing that we were going to do *The King's Threshold*, she generously offered not only to design the costumes but to supply them as well. This was a great piece of good fortune, because the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

play has a cast of seventeen and to find costumes for so many would have been a severe strain on our finances. Miss Horniman stayed with us until the play was produced, and personally supervised the making of the costumes. It was her first visit to Dublin and, accustomed as she was to queer folk at home and abroad, we must have struck her as a pretty crazy lot. She stayed at a quiet Temperance Hotel in Harcourt Street, where the meals in the dining-room were genteelly served at separate little tables. On her first morning at breakfast she was incommoded by her table having a short leg, so that it rocked every time it was touched. She complained to the waitress, who was most apologetic, "but I'll soon put it to rights, Ma'am." The girl went to the sideboard, cut half a slice of bread, slipped it under the short leg, remarking cheerfully, "There, that will steady it now." Some months later, when Miss Horniman came back to Dublin for the production of *Shadowy Waters*, she went to the same hotel. I asked her if the bread was still under the table. "Yes," she said, "but they have toasted it now."

Our next production, in December, was a worthy close to a memorable year. In the previous January, when Frank and I first went to help the Cumann na nGaedéal performances, Maire Quinn told me that after one of them she had received part of a play from a young writer who, she thought, showed great promise, though his work was still rough owing to lack of experience. As I had a high opinion of Maire Quinn's judgment—I sadly missed her help later on when

THE ABBEY

things were going badly at the Abbey Theatre and we had to face continual opposition—I said I would like to see him. And so, when we were working at our production of *Deirdre* at St. Teresa's, she brought along her young protégé. That was my first meeting with Padraic Colum. I took him into the cast as one of the sons of Fergus. At that time he could have been no more than twenty years of age—at any rate that is what he looked like—of medium build and height, with light brown hair and a perfect Grecian profile. Altogether he was not unlike Rupert Brooke. Colum was a clerk at the railway clearing house. Office hours were long, and he had but little time for literary work; but whenever the spirit moved him he just dotted down at odd moments a poem or a scrap of dialogue on the first bit of paper that came handy—the back of an invoice or an envelope or the corner of some useless document. A lot of the first script of *Broken Soil*, the play that he had sent to Maire Quinn, arrived in that form. When we decided to make *Broken Soil* the chief item in our December programme, the ever-helpful Maire sorted out the scraps for us and had them typed, while Colum was finishing the play in the same casual fashion. He would come into the hall at Camden Street, either before or after rehearsal, and, coming up to my table, would empty his pockets of pieces of paper of all shapes and colours and sizes, saying, "I've a lot more here, Will." Then he would begin to shuffle the pack. "Here's the first bit . . . no, that's a bit of Act II, and that's another bit of it." Then, taking, say, a blue triangular piece,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

“ Ah, yes, here’s the bit to follow where we left off last time. And this yellow bit is next. And then this on the back of the envelope.” It took a deal of patience to get the jigsaw puzzle into shape, but he learned dramatic technique very quickly, and I think his playing with us helped him to understand very soon the limitations imposed by a stage and proscenium.

Broken Soil was something of a novelty to us. It was our most ambitious effort since *Deirdre*, being a three-act play, though not such a very long one. The scene is laid in a part of the country that we had never represented before—the borders of Longford and Cavan. The story is told more by narrative than by action, but there is plenty of scope for character acting, of which full advantage was taken by a cast consisting of Sara Allgood, Honor Lavelle, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, P. J. Kelly and my brother Frank. Above all it is (as the immortal Joxer Daly might have said) “ a darlin’ play.” The picture of the life of the old travelling fiddler, Con Hourican, and his daughter Maire has that combination of pathos and humour, “ the smile on the lips and the tear in the eye,” that is always the playwright’s winning hand, and nowhere so much as in Ireland. *Broken Soil*, therefore, was rapturously received. For the first time in our own country we had not only enthusiastic audiences but an enthusiastic Press. There were, of course, some kindly scribes who, knowing how young our author was and never having written a play themselves, were anxious to put him on the right lines with copious hints upon construction and characterisation. But

THE ABBEY

all were agreed that at last the Irish National Theatre was delivering the genuine goods, that at last there was a playwright untainted either by the mystical notions that had made them dislike Yeats or the unblinking realism that had made them hate Synge. Let me quote a few of these Press opinions of *Broken Soil*:

The sincerity and vitality of the dialogue invigorates one from beginning to end. In representing the sacrifice of love to a higher duty it is in sharp contrast to the cynical sensualism of the Wicklow drama.

The audience felt that they were applauding the youngest playwright that ever stood on a stage to receive the reward of a well-deserved tribute for work that certainly entitles him to the warmest congratulations.

Mr. F. J. Fay looked the country fiddler to the life. Miss Nic Shiubhlaigh as Maire was excellent; hers was indeed a vivid portrayal of the emotional and affectionate girl whose love for her father and whose pity for his weakness triumph over all other feelings.

Broken Soil is a national drama in a fuller sense perhaps than any yet presented, not because its theme is Irish, but because the play is built and the catastrophe produced from circumstances arising out of the temperament, religion and tradition peculiar to the Irish people.

The last extract, I may say, is from Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* which had behaved so scurvily over Synge's play. The author of the notice was one whose name is now nearly as well known in England as in Ireland—Oliver St. John Gogarty.

This was all very gratifying, but it provoked one bitter reflection—what a contrast to the reception of

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

In the Shadow of the Glen! Colum's work had undoubted charm and showed great promise, but compared with Synge's it was as water is to wine, having none of the spiritual drive or sureness of technique that had proclaimed Synge a master. Now, it is true that everywhere and always the Columns will be preferred to the Synges, gifted work to work of genius—until, that is, the one and only infallible critic, old Father Time, has his say. But in Ireland this general frailty of mankind is apt to be aggravated by other considerations. In the case in point Synge had the misfortune to be not only a genius, but a Protestant and a member of the "Ascendancy" class, whereas Colum was a Catholic and of the people. In judging their work these were the things that counted. Their respective merits as artists were of minor importance. It was a patriotic duty to howl down the one and cheer the other to the echo.

We did no more productions in 1903, but we kept on rehearsing at Camden Street in the intervals of debating every subject under the sun, which seemed to be our main occupation, especially if "Æ" dropped in to set us some problem. Some nights he would not come in till very late, and then I would walk up to his house in Rathgar with him, and he would invite me in to sit at the fire. As we smoked our pipes he would explain the fundamental truths of life, quoting from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and Plato, giving me ideas that I'd never heard of until I met him—ideas that, if one believed them to be true, meant a complete re-orientation of one's life. What

THE ABBEY

patience he had ! Many times in the summer we sat till the singing of the birds in the garden made us aware that day had come, and with many apologies I would rush off to my rooms at Mrs. Walker's in High Street to snatch a couple of hours' sleep and be at my work, with breakfast over, at 8 a.m. I have never met anyone with a memory or knowledge like his. He could quote long passages from things he had written twenty years before and never miss a word. He was a light to all of us. Young writers gathered at his house on Sunday nights to hear him talk about the technique of their art. The room would be packed, the air thick with tobacco smoke, and you would hear more good things said in that room in an hour than you would find written in a dozen books. There was one young poet, a friend of Oliver Gogarty and Seumas O'Sullivan, who was so very shy that it was a long time before he could be persuaded to come. When he did, he brought with him some poems written in tiny characters in the middle of folio sheets of parchment. Very fine and very delicate were these first poems of James Joyce, author of *Ulysses*.

On Saturday afternoons or on Sundays "Æ" painted his pictures, and once a year he had a one-man show of them at which he disposed of them all at extremely low prices. They were wonderful drawings, brilliant in colour and design. His advice to me was, "If you want to paint, paint. If you want to write, write. It's in the doing of things that one learns how they should be done." I have always tried to follow it.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

With the idea of keeping our company together as much as possible we used to take Sunday walks into the mountains up to Glen Dhu. We carried our lunches in paper bags and had tea at the little post-office just below the glen, where new-laid eggs, home-baked bread and vast pots of tea would make a satisfactory end to the day. These walks gave us a great opportunity for airing our views on all sorts of subjects, some of which we knew a lot about, and others of which we knew nothing to mention. But lack of knowledge in Ireland or anywhere else is never any bar to talking plenty at any time. On some Sundays rehearsals or other work brought us back to town early; on others, as evening came on we would turn off at Dundrum and walk along to J. B. Yeats's house, where there was always a welcome for us, and over a cup or two, or maybe three, of coffee a fresh debate would start, the last play would be criticised or the prospects of the next one discussed. All the time our host would be busy in a corner with his sketch book, rapidly pencilling one of those delightful portraits that he was always creating whenever he had the chance.

CHAPTER IV

OUR spring season of 1904 opened with a purely artistic experiment. We produced Mr. Yeats's *Shadowy Waters*, not for its dramatic value, but for the sake of the verse, which, considered as a medium for fine speaking, is among the best he has written. The result satisfied us that it was possible to make a company of verse speakers and to gather an audience that would get the same pleasure from listening to beautiful speaking as those who like singing get from listening to an opera. We never got a chance to perfect the idea before we left the theatre, but in Miss Nic Shiubhlaigh and Miss Allgood we had two artists whom we had chosen for their special gifts in this regard, and Miss Allgood since then has brilliantly shown that our judgment was right.¹ Mr. Yeats and the young poets and everybody else who liked poetry were delighted, but as usual they were in a minority. The majority detested the whole thing and said so. When they didn't abuse Mr. Yeats they abused us. For example: "All this atmosphere of mystery, passion and beauty so powerful in the poem could not be represented without an exquisite setting such, perhaps, as Beerbohm Tree could give it. . . . Except to arrange a beautiful scene of colouring, little or no attempt was made to give any representation of the ship or the surrounding sea and sky." This sapient

¹ Mr. Clark of Falkirk has recently succeeded where we failed. His verse-speaking company, when they came to London with Gordon Bottomley's play *Ardvorlich's Wife*, won the first prize in the Drama League Festival.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

soul wanted a real ship on a stage fifteen feet by ten ! (I wonder if he would have liked the elaborate one built for Tree's production of *The Tempest* at His Majesty's Theatre.) On the other hand, in *New Ireland* Tom Kettle, a poet himself, got our point of view exactly : " On the whole it may be doubted if it was wise to take the piece in hand just now, but personally, as I have said, I will endure any scenic deficiency for the delight of hearing Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh and Frank Fay deliver verse."

Once more we had invaluable help from Miss Horniman, who made all our costumes to designs supplied by the author, and very beautiful they were when the full cast was seen on the stage at the end of the play. Just as she was leaving Dublin she said to me, " I have had some spare money by me lately, and I have been advised to put it into Hudson Bay shares. If by some chance they do anything very exciting, I shall have enough money to buy the society a little theatre in Dublin. In the meantime keep on working hard." Now if there was one part of the daily paper that I never dreamed of looking at it was the markets page. Bulls and bears, contangoes, gilt-edged and short-term money meant nothing at all to me. But after what Miss Horniman had said I watched the daily quotations of Hudson Bays with all the feverish excitement of a punter. The Hudson Bay shares rose. The Hudson Bay shares kept on rising slowly but surely, while I kept saying a handful of prayers that they might rise for ever—that is, until I should hear from Miss Horniman that

THE ABBEY

the deal was so good that it was safe to look out for a place.

In February, with a revival of *Deirdre*, we gave Synge's second play, *Riders to the Sea*, the most perfect one-act play that has come out of the Irish Theatre whether at the Molesworth Hall or the Abbey. It has all the austere strength of a Greek tragedy. From beginning to end there is not a superfluous word. It never fails to make the audience accept its inevitableness, and it plays just as well with actors that are not Irish. I have seen it performed by English and by Scottish players, and not a grain of its dramatic quality was lost. C. E. Montagu, in his *Dramatic Values*, says well of it that "it takes you straight into black tragedy. You step through one door into darkness." And yet George Moore could not see much in it. "An experiment in language rather than a work of art," he said; "a painful rather than a dramatic story." Even in masterpieces there's no pleasing everybody.

Meanwhile I was always wondering and considering what Miss Horniman would do if her Hudson Bays came up to expectation. About this time there was a bad enough fire in an English theatre, closely followed by a shocking one involving great loss of life at the Iroquois Theatre, Chicago. Local authorities throughout the United Kingdom began to tighten up the theatre regulations, with the result that one of the oldest houses in Dublin had to close down. Attached to a mechanics' institute, and hence commonly known as "The Mechanics," this was at one time under the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

management of that great character actress, Mrs. Glenville, mother of Shaun Glenville. The institute occupied the site of the old Theatre Royal Opera House, built by "Buck" Jones in 1820 and burnt down some years later. The trustees of the Mechanics' Institute in Capel Street had taken over the ruins, and rebuilt the place as a new Mechanics' Institute with a little theatre attached. For many years this little theatre was officially called "The People's Music Hall"; but the last lessees, Mr. J. B. Carrickford and Madame Louise Grafton, of the well-known Irish touring management, changed the name to "The National Theatre." This was prophetic. The "National" had no patent from the Lord Lieutenant, hence the management could not perform stage plays of more than one act, and all the dramas had to be cut down and altered accordingly. Even so the other theatres complained that Mr. Carrickford was infringing their patents; and, being threatened with a fine of £100 a night, he was obliged to return to vaudeville, which he ran most successfully until the Corporation Fire Department insisted upon structural alterations that would have cost much more than he or the Trustees were prepared to pay.

As soon as I heard that the theatre was closed I made it my business to examine it for necessary alterations and to inquire into what money these would cost. This done, I sent full particulars to Miss Horniman, suggesting that here was our chance. Her answer told us that our luck was in. Hudson Bays having risen well above what she required of them, she came

THE ABBEY

over to Dublin at once. We had among our staunchest supporters an experienced architect, Mr. Joseph Holloway, who made a thorough survey of the theatre, Miss Horniman and I assisting. In itself it proved to be incapable of alteration in accordance with the Corporation schedule, which included, not only new exits, but a new stage and new dressing-rooms. But by a happy chance there were certain premises adjoining (at one time used as a morgue) that were to let, and these, Mr. Holloway decided after inspection, if combined with the theatre, would provide the accommodation we needed. Miss Horniman accepted on the spot Holloway's estimate for the alterations—the figure worked out at £1300—and instructed Messrs. Whitney and Moore, solicitors, to make all legal arrangements, including an application for a patent.

We were near crazy with excitement at the prospect of having a theatre of our own, when, to put the feather in our hat, the London Irish Literary Society again invited us to London. And this time we were to perform in style. It was to be a real West End theatre. Of course we went. Miss Horniman, good angel, helped the Literary Society with the publicity side, circularising everywhere—north, south, east and west—to such effect that, when we appeared at the Royalty Theatre on March 26, the house was packed at both performances. Among those who came to see and applaud us were George Wyndham, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Lord Aberdeen, Leonard (not yet Lord) Courtney, Sir Frederick Pollock, Dr. Stopford Brooke and J. M. Barrie. At the matinée

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

we gave the two Synge plays and *The King's Threshold*, repeating the latter in the evening along with *A Pot of Broth* and *Broken Soil*. The English Press was as flattering as ever and was particularly impressed by the work of Synge and Colum. Of all the critics none was more sympathetic or understanding than C. E. Montagu. To Frank and me he was particularly kind, not only then, but for many a year afterwards through all our varying fortunes. Writing in the *Manchester Guardian* he made the same point that Walkley had made in *The Times* the year before: "They know how to let things alone, how to stand still when there is nothing to be done in the way of enhanced artistic effect by moving . . . how to fade into the background when attention has to be concentrated on a single other character."

And then, just at this handsome moment, along came misfortune. In 1904 America was preparing one of her big stunts, the International Exposition to be held at St. Louis in the following year. The organisers of the Irish section had the idea of adding us to their list of attractions, and made us an offer that left nothing to be desired in liberality. We were sorely tempted, but we refused. There were too many difficulties. For one thing, it was doubtful if we could muster enough members prepared to throw up their jobs and provide a representative company. But even if that could have been managed, we still had to consider whether it was worth our while to interrupt our work in Dublin for the best part of a year in order to be an exhibition side-show at St. Louis and with no assurance

THE ABBEY

that the Americans would like us when they saw us. Although we refused to go to America as a society, we could not prevent individual members from going; and so presently I lost the three players I could least spare—Dudley Digges, Maire T. Quinn (afterwards Mrs. Digges) and P. J. Kelly. Dudley was a loss I was never able to repair. I suppose the Irish actor most like him is Fred O'Donovan, but I had left Dublin before he joined the Abbey Theatre. Dudley was the best juvenile man and character actor I have ever had to work with. Our loss has been America's gain, for he rose rapidly to the first rank, playing with George Arliss and creating part after part for the famous New York Theatre Guild. He is now making character parts in star films at Hollywood. P. J. Kelly and Maire Quinn have also done well on the other side.

This was the first break in the original team, and very vexing it was, for apart from the loss of personnel it meant recasting all the departed players' parts in our repertory and rehearsing them anew.

To return to Miss Horniman. In the month of April she wrote to Mr. W. B. Yeats a formal letter announcing that she was taking over the "Mechanics' Institute Theatre" in Abbey Street and an adjoining building in Marlborough Street to convert them into a small theatre for the use of the National Theatre Society. She proceeded: "As the company will not require the hall constantly I propose to let it for lectures, entertainments, etc., at a rental proportionate to its seating capacity. . . . The prices of the seats can be

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

raised, of course, but not lowered either by the National Theatre Society or by anyone who may hire the hall. . . . I can only afford to make a very little theatre and it must be quite simple. You all must do the rest to make it a powerful and prosperous theatre with a high artistic ideal."

The society replied thanking her and undertaking to abide by her conditions. With this letter the Society became responsible for the theatre, and remained so until the following year, when it was turned into a limited liability company owing to the increased responsibility arising from the payment of regular salaries to the artists.¹

In August, ¹⁸⁶⁴ in spite of the strenuous opposition of the existing patent theatres, a patent for the new theatre was granted. As Miss Horniman was not resident in Ireland and was therefore ineligible as a patentee, it was made out in the name of Lady Gregory. The patentee's licence was restricted to the exhibition of "plays in the Irish or English languages, written by Irish writers on Irish subjects, selected by the Irish National Theatre Society, or such works of foreign authors as would tend to interest the public in the higher forms of dramatic art."

It was now possible to make a beginning with the

¹ The letter was signed by W. B. Yeats, F. J. Fay, William G. Fay, James G. Starkey, Frank Walker, Thomas G. Keohler, Henry F. Norman, Helen Laird, George Russell, Marie Walker (Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh), Adolphus Wright, Maire Garvey, Vera Esposito, Dora L. Annesley, George Roberts, Douglas Hyde, J. M. Synge, Sara Allgood, Frederick Ryan, Padraic Colum, Stephen Gwynn and Augusta Gregory.

THE ABBEY

work of reconstruction, whereupon the question arose, Who was to oversee the work on Miss Horniman's behalf? It was not an easy post to fill; for, while on the one hand the overseer would have to watch all Miss Horniman's interests in a businesslike way, he must also have enough practical knowledge of theatre construction and equipment to see that the building was a complete working proposition when the contractors handed it over. The architect could not be expected to give decisions on technical matters concerned with the mechanical side of the stage and the lighting apparatus. I was the only person available with the necessary qualifications, but I was busy at my own work from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., and whoever took on the job of overseer would have to be at the theatre all day. We put the difficulty before Miss Horniman. She said that she was spending so much on the work already that she could not afford to give more than £70 a year as a salary for someone to look after the place. (I may here observe that the common notion that Miss Horniman was an extremely wealthy woman, to whom the venture was a mere bagatelle, is a complete error. I have reason to know that her income at that time barely touched four figures, and to give us the theatre meant considerable sacrifice on her part.)

I was doing fairly well at my electrical work, and had enough experience and knowledge to hold down a foreman's job; but when I was faced with the alternative of giving it up for a small salary or letting the theatre be reconstructed without proper technical

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

supervision I did not hesitate. The theatre stood for everything in life that was of importance to Frank and me. All my friends and relations said I was mad, consoling themselves and me with the reflection that I had always been more or less cracked. "To throw away a good business to work in a theatre that no one wanted and that couldn't last a year!" "If it even played what the public wanted itself!" "Having wasted years roaming up and down the country, then to settle down to a respectable life, and then to begin play-acting all over again! Well, what could you expect? A rolling stone gathers no moss." But who wants to be mossy anyway?

And so I spent my days for the next few months watching the building grow into a model little theatre. I was able to explain to the various contractors exactly what we wanted. Here my experience as an electrician stood me in good stead. As far as possible Miss Horniman employed Irish firms. The stained glass was designed and made by Miss Purser and her assistants at the Tower of Glass. The copper-framed mirrors came from a home industry at Youghal, and on the wall opposite the mirrors were hung some beautiful designs of hand embroidery, the work of Miss Lily Yeats, whose father, Mr. J. B. Yeats, painted the large portrait of Miss Horniman on the north wall.

Before we opened Miss Horniman commissioned Mr. J. B. Yeats to paint a portrait of me also. Sunday was my only free day, so I sat to him Sunday after Sunday until he was finished. He was a peculiarly restless worker. He walked back and forward all the

THE ABBEY

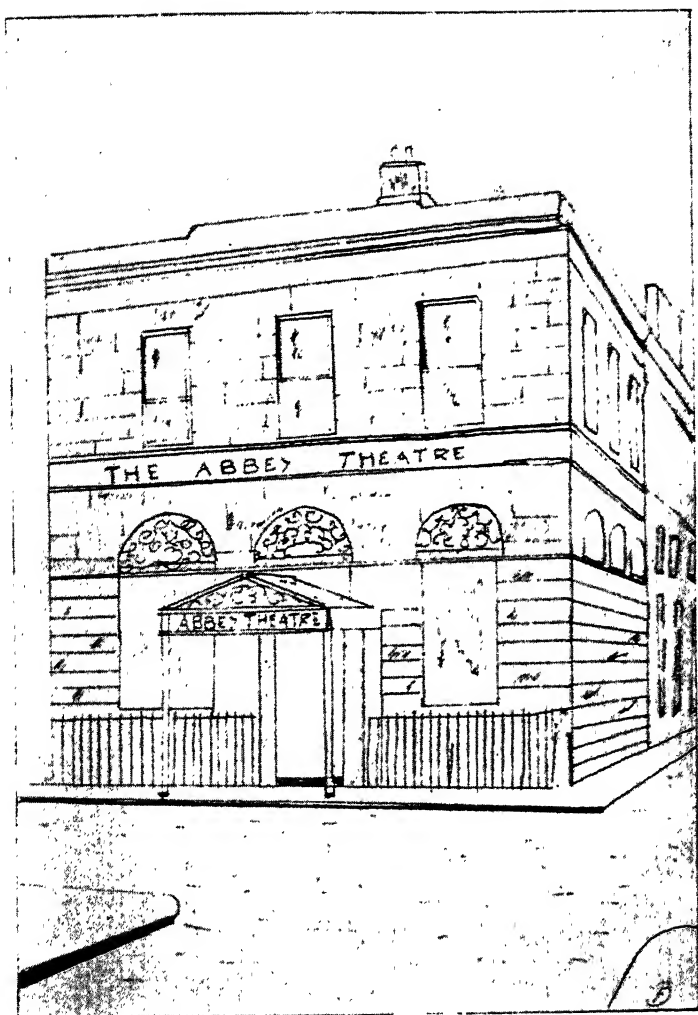
time, only halting now and again to use a tiny mirror from his pocket to see by reflection how the picture was getting on. Also he talked all the time, and it was the most entertaining talk I have ever listened to, as anyone who has read his book of reminiscences can guess. He knew or had known everybody of interest both in London and in Dublin, and had an immense fund of stories about them. There never was such a man for walking and talking. He lived at Dundrum and used to walk the five miles to his studio every day, walk miles up and down and round about it all day while he was painting, and then for exercise walk home again in the evening. He was one of the first Irish landlords to sell out to his tenants, and then, rather late in life, he went to London to take up painting. His portraits were full of recognition of the quality of his sitters, and his pencil drawings were a joy to look at—delicate in workmanship, brimful of character, and so like !

One Sunday we were talking about telegraph poles, and he told me how the Pigott forgeries were discovered. There was a very strong supporter of Parnell who was a telegraphist at the cable station at Valentia, and there passed through his hands a number of code messages from Pigott to an address in New York. The telegraphist became suspicious and took copies which he sent to the Irish Parliamentary party in London, but no one could decode them. They were shown to the Archbishop of Dublin, who happened to be on a visit to London. He deciphered them without difficulty, for the code turned out to be

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

the very elementary one used by Edgar Allen Poe in *The Gold Bug*. Another time we were discussing astrology, about which he did not fail to have a curious anecdote. When his son, W. B. Yeats, was paying a visit to an uncle in Sligo, he had with him a set of tarot cards from which he was learning divination. The uncle, a prominent shipowner and business man in the town, became very much interested and, after mastering the tarot cards, proceeded to the study of astrology, in which he was now reputed to be an adept. I thought it would be amusing to test his alleged powers and suggested that he should be sent some particulars about some member of our company and see what he would say. Mr. Yeats was agreeable, provided that no more information was sent beyond the date and hour of birth. So we sent the date and birth hour of one of the girls, and in a few days had a reply which gave an accurate description of her. The astrologer identified the "native" as a girl, and went on to say that she had brown eyes, shiny brown hair and Grecian features, with a host of other details even to her way of walking. He ended by saying that she had great histrionic ability but probably not enough vitality to carry it to success against opposition. He was right.

Work at the theatre went on quickly and smoothly, and by December all was ready. It was certainly a very little place. The auditorium, with its one circle, had a seating capacity of 500 only, and the acting area was about 20 feet by 15. But it was admirably equipped and suited us to perfection. It was now



THE ABBEY THEATRE

THE ABBEY

called the Abbey Theatre, a name that has become famous throughout the civilised world. It was the first modern repertory theatre in the true sense of the word, with a repertory of over forty plays, any of which could be staged at a day's notice. It was destined to be the parent of over six hundred little theatres all over the United States. On December 27, 1904, the curtain was rung up for the first time.

CHAPTER V

THAT was a great evening. Our cosy little house was crowded. All that was best in Dublin life, of whatever colour in religion or politics, was represented—political Nationalism by John Dillon and Stephen Gwynn, literature by W. B. Yeats, “Æ” and Edward Martyn and art by J. B. Yeats and Hugh Lane. The *Manchester Guardian* took the occasion so seriously that it sent its most promising young man, a Mr. John Masefield (who has done well since then if one can believe the newspapers) to report on our doings. The only flaw in the proceedings was that neither of the two ladies who were doing so much for us was able to be present—Miss Horniman because she had had to return to England, and Lady Gregory because she was on a bed of sickness.

According to our custom at that time we gave a quadruple bill, consisting of two revivals and two new plays. The revivals were *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The novelties were Mr. Yeats’s one-act blank verse tragedy, *On Baile’s Strand*, and *Spreading the News*, the first and most uproarious of the many delicious half-hours of fooling with which Lady Gregory was to enrich the repertory of the Abbey Theatre. Speaking for myself I maintain that *Hyacinth Halvey* is her masterpiece in that kind, but *Spreading the News* has always been the most popular. It has the simple universal appeal—the “Russian Scandal” motive—that makes it what the Americans call “sure fire,” and it goes with a bang from the first



W. G. FAY FRANK FAY J. A. O'Rourke
ARTHUR SINCLAIR

BRIGIT O'DEMPSEY
SARA ALLGOOD

FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "HYACINTH HALVEY" AT THE ABBEY
THEATRE, 1906

THE ABBEY

line to the fall of the curtain. We got a tremendous pace into it, the pace of a hard football match, so fast that, when later we played it in England as we had played it in Dublin, there were complaints from the front of the house that hardly a word could be understood. Years afterwards I felt the same grievance myself over the Devonshire dialect of *The Farmer's Wife*, when that had to be played up to the full pitch of speed.

Considered purely as drama *On Baile's Strand* may not be Mr. Yeats's best play though the theme is effective enough, being the Irish version of a world-wide folk tale. The epic hero Cuchulain does single combat with his own son, not knowing who is his adversary until he has struck the mortal blow. A very elementary tragedy, but Matthew Arnold put it into fine verse in *Sohrab and Rustum* and Mr. Yeats did the like in *On Baile's Strand*, which, as actor and producer, I venture to say is the most brilliant achievement in theatrical blank verse of our time. As Cuchulain Frank got the best part he ever had up till then. An epic hero, it is true, should properly be played by a big man, and Frank was far from that; but on the stage he had the power of making you forget his lack of inches, even as Henry Irving could make you forget his excess of them. His delivery of the verse gave a quality to his impersonation that made up for all physical deficiencies. The part of Daire, one of the kings, was played by a young man who since then has proved himself to be the greatest natural comedian and the only one of his kind that the Irish theatre has

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

produced up to the present time. His comedy from the first had all the ease and directness that in England belongs supereminently to George Robey. If ever actors are born comedians, Arthur Sinclair is one. Comedy comes as easy to him as breathing, and both here and in America he has set a pattern that would be hard to improve upon.

And now the Abbey Theatre was launched on its voyage of fame. It was not a rich adventure. We had only a matter of forty pounds in cash in hand to keep us afloat, but, thanks to Miss Horniman, we were worthily housed and free from debt, and could fairly boast of being the only endowed theatre in the English-speaking world. We faced the future with confidence, not to say hardihood, and the measure of it was that for our very next production (February 1905) we trailed our coats in front of the Dublin public by presenting a full-length play by Synge. This was *The Well of the Saints*, in my opinion his best play. He gave himself a large enough canvas on which to paint the picture in his mind. He had felt what all writers of one-act plays must feel sooner or later, that the concentration demanded by a short play allows one to give only the headings and suggestions of what ought to be full scenes, if truthfully developed. As for the story, a great deal of research has gone in trying to find out the source of it; but to me this has always seemed to be a waste of time, though it may be interesting. All good dramatists have taken their plots from where they could find them. Shakespeare used Italian *novelle*; Wilde got the theme of *Lady Windermere's Fan* from

THE ABBEY

The Family Herald; and Arnold Bennett, as he once told me, had a box full of old Spanish plays that he dipped into now and again when he was short of ideas. Whether the idea of *The Well of the Saints* came from *The Maid of Malines* or *Marianiela* is immaterial. In any case those who knew Synge knew that in his travels through the back mountains of Wicklow and Kerry, as well as during his sojourn in the Aran Islands, he had collected enough stories for many plays without having recourse to foreign soil.

When one is producing a difficult play like this it is not easy to remain objective, to see it from the point of view the audience will take on the first night. It is only after years of experience with all kinds of plays and all kinds of audiences that one acquires the working knowledge of crowd psychology that enables one to tell, while a play is still in rehearsal, whether it is likely to offend or not. That is the most one can do. There is no way of foretelling success. The most experienced producers and actors can be deceived, and are so every day. But one can at least discern any factor that will militate against success and try to eliminate it before the public sees the play. Here, I believe, the author has to be consulted, and authors are notoriously obstinate. I never could get either Yeats or Synge to understand that if you write plays to be acted, not read by the fireside, there are certain rules that you cannot break without destroying the sympathy between the stage and auditorium. The rules I refer to are not technical but psychological. For example, as *The Well of the Saints* took shape, I

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

realised that every character in the play from the Saint to Timmy the Smith was bad-tempered right through the play, hence, as I pointed out to Synge, all this bad temper would inevitably infect the audience and make them bad-tempered too. I suggested that the Saint anyway might be made into a good-natured easy-going man, or that Molly Byrne might be made a lovable young girl, but Synge would not budge. He said he wanted to write "like a monochrome painting, all in shades of the one colour." I argued that all drama depended on contrast and on tension. All in vain. We had to agree to differ.

One technical trouble we had to overcome was that Synge had not yet acquired the art of breaking up his dialogue into short speeches, without which it is impossible for the actors to get pace. Many of his speeches were very long. They took a cruel lot of practice before we could get them spoken at a reasonably good pace and without at the same time losing the lovely lilt of his idiom. Take, for example, the Saint's speech at the end of the first act. "May the Lord—who has given you sight—send a little sense into your head the way it won't be—on you two selves you'll be looking," etc. Worse still for the actors is Martin's speech in Act III when he enters blind. "The divil mend Mary Doul—for putting lies on me—and letting on she was grand. The divil mend the ould saint for letting me see it was lies," etc.

The Well of the Saints had very much the same reception as *In the Shadow of the Glen*. As before, few of our public knew what to make of it. Was it a

THE ABBEY,

piece of harsh realism or was there something else behind it? The lyrical speeches were beyond them, and there was the old suspicion that most of the plays we produced were intended in some way to debunk the saintly Irish character. Who, for example, would be trusting Mr. Yeats? Hadn't he always something up his sleeve? If it wasn't the birds of Angus Oge it might be a political rabbit of some kind. Then, Synge, of course, had heard of a man called Boccaccio and a story about the Widow of Ephesus. In short the play was admired and enjoyed by those who were capable of regarding it simply as a play without reading into it a criticism of the Irish people or an attack on their religion. But these were too few. The great majority, thinking of religion and themselves, abominated the play on both counts. It had a bad Press and we lost money and audience over it.

However, we enjoyed doing it, not only because it gave us excellent scope for acting, but also because a three-act play was less of a strain than our usual bill of four one-act plays. Every actor will understand what it means to have to play four short parts in the same evening involving four changes of costume and make-up in addition to the necessity for rapid emotional readjustment. By the time we had been two years at the Abbey I had tried every kind of beard and moustache that had ever been seen on a human face and some that hadn't. Ultimately I gave up wearing face moss of any kind and trusted that our kind friends in the front would be sufficiently amused by the face I had started life with. Luckily by that time

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Arthur Sinclair was able to take over most of the comedy parts, and then it was he who had to bother with the crêpe hair. Unless one is a Sir Herbert Tree, one cannot keep on finding new make-ups for ever.

In March we broke entirely new ground with a three-act play by Lady Gregory, which was particularly welcome because it dealt with a popular subject in historical legend—the life of Brian Boru, or “Brian of all the talents.” You see that made it a safe proposition, and it had the further advantage of being long enough to fill the whole evening without a fore-piece. Special scenery and costumes were designed by Lady Gregory’s son Robert and painted and made in the theatre. In the case of the scenery it was Robert Gregory’s first experience of having to enlarge a finished design to something many times the size of the original. But he was eager to learn and worked hard with me in the paint room. When the last scene, “The Wood of Clontarf,” was finished it provided a new sensation for Dublin in those days; for, instead of the orthodox wood scene showing dozens of trees with every leaf stippled on to them, it was just a pattern of boles of trees with a leaf design applied in one colour, the whole giving a rhythmic effect of greens and greys.

On the first night the theatre was completely filled for the first time since our opening night, and the play met with unqualified approval. The Press for once was most friendly. Even *The United Irishman* agreed that the play was worth producing. Lady Gregory certainly showed great skill in combining historical

THE ABBEY

accuracy with dramatic quality, by no means always an easy matter. The play was further notable for being one of the earliest attempts to get rid of the "tushery" which has always been the bane of period drama. By the time she wrote *Devorgilla* she had perfected her method so that there is not a trace of incongruity in the modern diction of her characters. Recently in *Tobias and the Angel* Mr. James Bridie has brilliantly shown how the same method can be applied to a Biblical subject.

As soon as the production and the plaudits were over, Robert Gregory returned to London to resume his work at the Slade School. A few weeks later Lady Gregory casually mentioned to me that she had just had a letter from her son to say that he had been in bed with a cold but was now better and at work again. However, as is the nature of anxious mothers, she seemed to worry a bit, and presently she said, "You won't want me here for a day or two, so I think I'll run over to London to see how he is myself. I should feel easier. Don't tell anyone where I have gone or they will be making a fuss. I will be back by Friday." And so she went forthwith. Next morning, when I came down town, the first person I met greeted me with, "Have you heard the news about Robert Gregory?" I said no. "Oh, he has been taken very ill and rushed off to hospital." I said I hoped it was nothing serious, and passed on, only to encounter another who was bursting with news. "Have you heard about Robert Gregory?" he said. "He is so ill his mother has been wired for and she

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

has rushed off by the night boat for London." Half an hour later I was informed by somebody else that Robert had been run down by a bus, then that he had been run over by a taxi, presently that one of his legs would have to be amputated below the knee, and finally that both his legs were so mangled that he would have to go about on crutches for the rest of his life. By the time Lady Gregory got back to Dublin there wasn't much left of Robert. The truth, of course, was that, as he had said, he had only had a slight cold and she might have saved herself her trouble. When I told her what a fine story Dublin had made of it all she laughed heartily and replied, "And people said that *Spreading the News* was an improbable play!"



SCENE FROM "SPREADING THE NEWS," BY LADY GREGORY

CHAPTER VI

VERY early in our new career—it was in April 1905—we introduced to our public an author who became a great favourite, William Boyle. He was from the Dundalk neighbourhood, where his people had been farmers for generations—in fact he was the first of the family to leave the land. He was in London in the Inland Revenue. He had already been known a good many years as a prolific writer of poems and short stories of peasant life, and now he took the opportunity offered by the Abbey Theatre of showing his quality as a playwright. His first effort was a satirical comedy called *The Building Fund*. Though thoroughly Irish, it was in general character much nearer the ordinary play of the commercial theatre than anything we had done up to that time. Boyle had lived in London and other large towns for half a lifetime and had seen every actor and actress of note. Hence he had a “theatre sense” that none of our other authors had had experience enough to develop—that power of fellow-feeling with an audience that has made Sir James Barrie the greatest dramatist of our time, and the lack of which always prevented Arnold Bennett from being successful in the theatre except when in collaboration. In *The Building Fund* Boyle had a very good story which gave us two new types of character in Mrs. Grogan, a miserly, cranky old woman, and her skinflint son Shaun.

The play was modern in the sense that the fun was not with the actors but against them. The

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

straighter they played their parts the funnier they were. From one point of view the Grogans are as nasty a pair as you could meet in a day's walk, but as characters in an Irish peasant comedy they are extremely amusing. The butt of every comedy is a tragic figure if taken seriously, but the cussedness of human nature pounces on a joyous moment when the stout middle-aged gentleman slips on a banana skin or chases his hat ineffectually as the wind blows it from gutter to gutter. While his play was running Boyle came over from London and went down to Dundalk to see his people. On returning to Dublin he brought the original of Shan Grogan with him to see the show. The man enjoyed it very much, but was puzzled to know whom Boyle could have had in mind when he created Shan! The other characters he could recognise at once as soon as they came upon the stage, and he gave them their real Dundalk names, but Shan was beyond him.

"Oh, wad some Power the giftie gie us." . . . But perhaps for the novelist and dramatist it is well that the Powers withhold the gift.

The Building Fund helped to popularise us with the ordinary public, for it was a bridge between the fare they got at the other theatres and the plays of Synge and Yeats. To the actors it was welcome because it played well over an hour and saved us the necessity of giving eight short plays when we had matinée and evening performances, with the consequent labour of changing costume and make-up. Our spring season came to an end in June with the production

THE ABBEY

of Colum's second play, *The Land*. Strange to say this was, and as far as I know still is, the only play written by an Irishman dealing with the land hunger of the small farmer. As a study of Irish character in the Irish Midlands it was the best play the society received during all the time I was producing for it. It was also the last play that Colum gave us in my time, though in 1910 his third and last Irish play, *Thomas Muskerry*, was produced at the Abbey. It was a great pity that he did not follow up his undoubted success as a dramatist. He had as much sense of atmosphere on the stage as Maeterlinck, and with it an instinct for character and drama of a kind that none of our other playwrights had. Like so many of our best Irish artists he has made his home in America.

Our enterprise was now developing so rapidly that before the end of the year we were faced with the necessity of putting it upon a new basis without delay. As an organisation under the Friendly Societies Act, the Irish National Theatre Society had been able to bear the cost of running the theatre and paying one or two essential members of the staff, such as the stage-carpenter and the housekeeper, but that was the utmost it could do. It was quite incapable of undertaking the steadily growing financial responsibility incidental to the evolution of the Abbey Theatre as a national institution. If we were to progress at all it was essential that the company should produce plays for more than one week in each month, which is what we were doing. We felt that we ought always to be trying to reach the condition of the ordinary

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

theatre with a stock company, and of every other theatre, in being open for six nights every week and one matinée. I was the only person free during the day to devote all my energies to the theatre. The rehearsals had to be done at night, and if the performance of each play was to be a clean one, that meant every night. Now, the actors were all amateurs, and no amateurs are keen enough to want to rehearse as often as that, for it means they have no free time at all except Sunday. Obviously we had come as far as was possible with voluntary help only. We had as good tools to work with as any body of actors could need, but a theatre must be managed as a theatre—that is, like any other business. The time had come when we must have at least the principal players free to rehearse during the day, and this meant that they would have to give up their other jobs, turn professional actors and receive salaries.

As the support we got from our audiences was not enough to cover the running expenses and upkeep of the theatre, we had to add to our revenue by letting it whenever it was not being used by the society. There was no margin out of which we could pay more salaries. As it was, I managed the theatre, produced all the plays, played the principal comedy parts, helped to make the scenery (doing all the painting) and in my spare time, mostly on Sunday, tried (not very effectively) to keep the accounts. I remember there was a floating half-crown that could never be satisfactorily traced. I could never make up my mind whether it was mine or belonged to the theatre. I

THE ABBEY

also watched over the staff and paid them their wages. With the best will in the world I could do no more—indeed how I managed to do so much without any help I cannot now understand.

There was one way that offered a fair prospect of making a little money, and that was by going on tour in England. But if the company were kept on the road week after week they would need not only their expenses but salaries as well. Miss Horniman was as anxious as we were that the plays should be seen in many places, and when she was consulted on the problem of paying the artists she offered to guarantee a salary list not exceeding £600 a year. This allowed us to make arrangements to pay our company up to a total sum of £12 a week—not an extravagant amount, you will admit. I am glad to be able to say that down to the day I left the Abbey, through good times and bad—and there were plenty of the latter—we never had to touch a penny of the guarantee, but always managed to make ends meet somehow on our own account. In giving the guarantee Miss Horniman very naturally made it a condition that we on our side should assure her of the stability of our organisations and of our desire to do all in our power to prevent her actually being called upon. As our members were all poor folk, quite unable to assume any financial liability, there was nothing for it but to dissolve the Irish National Theatre Society as such, and replace it by a limited liability company, called the National Theatre Company, formed under the provisions of the Friendly Societies Act dealing with artistic associa-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

tions not for profit-making. The directors of the new company were Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge, who held the bulk of the shares, while Miss Allgood, Miss Esposito, U. Wright, Frank and myself had, I think, one share each. The directors could in no circumstances make any profit out of the theatre, though of course they were entitled to the usual royalties when their plays were produced.

The new arrangement was inevitable, but it was carried out at a heavy cost. A large number of our members were violently opposed to the abandonment of our amateur status. They had come into the movement *con amore*, and resented its conversion into what in their view was a commercial undertaking. By going on to a professional basis, they argued, we had destroyed the special character of the movement, and they were no longer interested. Hence came about the second exodus from the company, and it was much more serious than the first, for all the voluntary help ceased and less than a third of the members of the Society remained on with the company. A few, while disapproving altogether of the new policy, continued to play until the end of the year rather than leave me in difficulties with my cast. For this respite I was very grateful, for it saved Frank and me from at once having to coach new people in the whole repertoire, which by this time was very considerable.

We planned our visit to London for the end of November, and this time it was decided that we should go on our own account and not under the auspices of any outside body. The advance arrangements and



MISS SARA ALLGOOD

THE ABBEY

publicity were once more in Miss Horniman's capable hands, and she suggested that it would be advisable to take in Oxford and Cambridge on our way to London, as University opinion on our plays and acting might be a valuable asset later. Accordingly I wrote to the manager of the Oxford theatre asking if he could offer us a date with Cambridge to precede or follow, for at that time the same management controlled the theatres at both places. I had a very curt refusal saying that he did not want to book any Irish plays. I expect he thought we were touring *The Shaughraun* and *The Colleen Bawn*, or some new Irish melodrama by Hubert O'Grady. Anyway he didn't want us. I told Miss Horniman of our bad luck. Now, Miss Horniman is not easily beaten, and she had made up her mind that Oxford and Cambridge were to see us. She wasted no time in regrets, but went down to Oxford herself and booked the Corn Exchange Hall for two performances on November 23rd, and then went on to Cambridge, where she took the Victoria Assembly Rooms for the evening of November 24th and the small Guildhall for a matinée on the same day.

Having taken the job in hand, she did it with her usual thoroughness. After booking the Corn Exchange for us, for which she had to get special leave from the Vice-Chancellor and the Mayor, she took up her quarters at Oxford and set the local concert agent to work circularising everybody that mattered and some that didn't. She interviewed dons and told them what wonderful plays we had and what wonder-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

ful actors and actresses we were. She arranged for some of our artists to have hospitality from heads of colleges for their mutual improvement. I was too old a bird to be caught by that, though, and asked her to book me rooms at an inn, pleading my uncertain hours as an excuse. If I had not, heaven alone knows what "dazzling light of learning" I might have inconvenienced at his meals for a couple of days, with me trying to accommodate my Irish brogue to his Oxford drawl. One of our boys was billeted on a very important person who had a large staff of servants. When he went to his room to wash his hands and make his hair lie down, he found that his bag had been opened for him and his one shirt, single pair of socks and two collars were distributed all over a roomy chest of drawers. His pyjamas, more holy than righteous, lay spread-eagled and lonesome-like on the bed, while two empty beer bottles from which he had been quenching his thirst on board the train stood looking as if suffering from an inferiority complex on the mantelpiece. When he told me his adventure I thanked the Lord that I was staying at a pub. The Corn Exchange had no fittings of any sort, either stage or seating accommodation, so we had to bring our own scenery and curtain and fit them up, and hire seating for the performance. We had a busy morning getting everything ready for the matinée, and the stage did not look as well as we could have wished. We played *On Baile's Strand*, *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *Spreading the News* at the matinée, and *The Well of the Saints* and *Kathleen ni Houlihan* in the evening.

THE ABBEY

The reception was amazing. Down to the Corn Exchange came everyone of note in Oxford from all the colleges. We had an audience such as the local theatre had never been able to draw, most of whom rarely went to see a play, and the undergraduates were in the minority. It was the first time we had played to a cultured audience of this kind, who could see that our authors were writing plays with ideas that at that time were far in advance of what the ordinary theatre was supplying. The colour and atmosphere produced by having an entirely Irish cast was something wholly new to them. For the first time in our experience no subtle point in any of the plays went unnoticed, and *The Well of the Saints* in particular was appreciated in a way that was in striking contrast with its reception in Dublin. Everybody was most hospitable, too. We were shown the principal sights, and tasted the very best from college cellars. Both artistically and financially the players came through with flying colours.

At Cambridge, whither Miss Horniman had preceded us as advance agent, we did just as well, though the conditions under which we had to work were even more inconvenient than those at Oxford, especially in that we had to play the matinée in one hall and the night show at another. As at Oxford, the audiences were thoroughly representative. They filled both halls in every part and there was once more the understanding and sympathy that made it a delight to play to them. Perhaps there is something to be said for English education after all. The undergraduates

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

were most enthusiastic, for the modern drama was then just beginning to interest young men. The plays of Yeats they had heard about and read, but the Synge play with its strange dialect and originality of outlook aroused genuine excitement. His vitality and freshness took their breath away. It is true that we missed the heartiness of like or dislike that one always gets from Irish audiences, but it was more than compensated for by the quickness of intellectual apprehension, and the gay and lively discussion that took place in various rooms after the performance and lasted into the early hours of the morning.

We went on to London in high spirits. On Monday, November 27th, we opened with our Irish magic in the home of Maskelyne, the St. George's Hall, Langham Place, giving matinées and evening performances for two days. We gave the same programme as at Oxford and Cambridge. With the exception of *In the Shadow of the Glen* they were all plays that had not been seen in London before; and this, too, was the first occasion on which Arthur Sinclair, U. Wright, A. Power, E. Keegan and J. Dunne had appeared before a London audience. The fact that there were four performances on two successive days gave variety to the Press notices, because each critic could only see one set of plays. However, they were all full of praise for what they did see, and they were the more discriminating perhaps now that they were seeing our work for the third time. *The Times* thought that the acting all round was rather more robust than on our previous visits though its

THE ABBEY

peculiar charm was undiminished. *The Sunday Times* discovered the importance of Synge. "Both from the literary and dramatic point of view," it said, "*The Well of the Saints* is an affair of European importance" —a prophecy in 1905 that has been amply verified in the course of thirty years. George Moore was especially pleased with Synge's play: "The interpretation partakes of the literary quality, it is original and it is like itself. Mr. Fay in his love scene with Molly Byrne seemed to me to give a little triumph of distinguished acting. Mr. Frank Fay gave the ecclesiastical note to the Saint in a way that might not have been caught by another actor. The part is a difficult one. The part of the beggar-woman is so well played by Miss Vernon that I shall regret having spoken of it, for I shall not find words wherewith to praise it enough. Above all I admired her reticence. The age of the old woman is portrayed in every gesture, the walk and the bodily stiffness, and something of the mind of an old woman, for in her voice there is a certain mental stiffness. Her elocution was faultless. . . . Mr. Synge has discovered great literature in barbarous idiom as gold is discovered in quartz, and to do such a thing is surely a rare literary achievement. . . ."

It was only Miss Horniman's astuteness that made it possible for us to have four performances at the St. George's Hall, for Mr. Maskelyne was not particularly anxious to have outsiders using his stage, which is full of contraptions that are necessary for his own branch of magic. Not that these were in evidence when we got there or that we found out how it was

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

all done, for a clause in our agreement stated that no one was to go on the stage at any time unless accompanied by one of the St. George's Hall staff. Between the performances I had an opportunity of meeting Mr. Maskelyne, and I found him a most interesting person and an expert electrical engineer with a lot of peculiar knowledge. He was working on the plans of a system of wireless telegraphy that he thought could hold its own with Marconi's. He told me that the smallest telephone ever made had a transmitter to fit into a signet ring and the receiver was made into an ear-ring. The owner of the ring could walk up and down a theatre where they were used, collecting questions from members of the audience to which a lady sitting blindfold on the stage gave replies. She wore ear-rings.

CHAPTER VII

THANKS to our English tour we reopened our Christmas season at the Abbey with a nice little balance in hand. The new play chosen for production was *The White Cockade*, a romantic comedy by Lady Gregory about King James II and the Battle of the Boyne. It was not intended to be historically accurate, but was made from material collected from popular songs and ballads composed after the battle. It is not as good a play as *Kincora*, for it lacks dramatic movement and the character of James is not well conceived, being neither fish, fowl nor good red herring. Moreover, when a play is a mixture of fact and fiction the actors are likely to suffer from having to play a series of short scenes none of which has enough emotional scope for anyone to show his quality. In spite of his poor part, the success of the evening was Arthur Sinclair, who played King James in a make-up that was a triumph in its resemblance to the original, if we may judge by the portraits.

After *The White Cockade* we lost some more of our players, the dissidents referred to before, who had only stayed to see this play through. Our greatest loss was our leading lady, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh. With her went Miss Lavelle, Miss Vernon, Miss Garvey, Frank Walker, Seumas O'Sullivan and George Roberts. This deprived every play in the repertoire of some of its cast, and in many cases it is doubtful if we ever had the parts so well played afterwards. It meant months of work for Frank and me, but in the circumstances

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

there was nothing to be done but to begin all over again. I had a lot of sympathy with those who had left us. They had taken up acting with no intention of making a business of it. They did not wish to devote their whole time to it, and they were suspicious of the commercial element that was bound to creep in once the artists were on salary. They did not agree that the choice of plays should be left with the three directors and myself. They wanted to retain the freedom of members to choose both the plays and the parts they wanted to play in them. Next year they started a new voluntary society, the Theatre of Ireland, which was carried on for some years with tolerable success. With us the places of Miss Nic Shiubhlaigh and Miss Vernon were filled by two new recruits to our stage—Miss Brigit O'Dempsey, whom I have already mentioned, and Miss Allgood's sister, Maire O'Neill. The latter became one of the stars of the Irish players, and when she left them she played with Sir George Alexander at the St. James's Theatre in *Turandot* and later with Tree at His Majesty's as Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*. She went with George Tyler to New York to play Mary Ellen in *General John Regan*. Since then she has been starring in New York and London. Everybody who has seen Mr. Lennox Robinson's joyful comedy, *The White-headed Boy*, will remember her richly diverting rendering of Aunt Ellen.

A constant source of worry was combining the necessary publicity with our strictly limited means. It meant among other things that we had to make as

THE ABBEY

many friends as we could among those who were interested in our project. Here we were helped by Lady Gregory's genius for entertainment. She was able to bring all sorts of people to the theatre to see the plays and to keep them afterwards to have supper on the stage with us, and this became the regular custom on all first nights. Our guests got to know the actors behind the footlights as well as in front of them, and gave us valuable hints by listening to the impressions made by each new play and by hearing remarks, expressions and criticisms not intended for repetition which had been overheard by those in front. Some proportion, at least, of these remarks were friendly or flattering, and this with the social occasion increased our confidence. A new sympathy grew up between us and our audiences.

Another scheme of Lady Gregory's that we liked even better than the first night suppers was the company's own private party after the dress-rehearsal, when she would arrive at the theatre laden with heavy parcels containing cooked chickens, pies and, among other dainties, the mainstay of these parties, a barm brack. No common barm brack this, from a Dublin shop, but one from her home at Gort, a special brand weighing about 10 lbs. and packed thick with raisins, currants and lemon-peel. A single slice of one of these Gort barm bracks was as good as a meal. For the Gort barm brack was the father and mother of a brack. Porter was in it too. The famous Miss Houligan's Christmas Cake could not hold a candle to it. You had to be very intimate with the company

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

to get invited to the party when there was a Gort barm brack in the centre of the table.

Our financial position at this time did not permit of us having a theatre orchestra. The directors thought that in time the audiences would adopt the Continental practice and move about the auditorium and vestibule between the acts; but, though the occupants of the stalls did so to some extent, the circle and the pit would never leave their seats. When we played four plays with the most rapid changes of scenery we could manage, the intervals were never less than ten minutes each, so that during the whole evening the audience had to amuse themselves for thirty minutes or more, which is much too long for any audience to be left to its own devices. And so we had to get some music. An orchestra was out of the question. Even a string quartet was beyond our means, but a single instrumentalist we could manage, and so we engaged Arthur Darley to play for us. He was a well-known Dublin violinist, who had a great collection of Irish airs, many of them noted down by himself in various parts of the country and never printed. In fact Darley did for the folk music of Ireland much the same kind of work that Mrs. Kennedy Fraser did for the folk music of the Hebrides. At our opening performance he played in front of the curtain before *Riders to the Sea* and during the intervals. He was an instantaneous success, and he was very skilful in his choice of items suitable to the action which was to follow when the curtain rose.

The Eloquent Dempsey, William Boyle's second play,

THE ABBEY

came most opportunely. It was a political satire on a theme that everybody knew and everybody was eager to see dramatised. Dempsey is one of a class that was only too prominent in Irish public life at that time—the political publican who has a finger in every pie and is ready at any moment to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. At the opening of the play he is wondering whether he ought to be a Nationalist or a Unionist, but cannot make up his mind. There is so much to be said for both sides. All his customers are, of course, Nationalists, but he is ambitious and doubts if the Nationalists can give him as much as the other people. It is true that the Nationalists offer to make him a County Councillor, but the Unionists tempt him with the noble prospect of becoming a Justice of the Peace provided only he will present an address of welcome to the Chief Secretary, who is about to pay an official visit to the town. He plays off one side against the other, and presently, finding himself in difficulties with both, he goes to bed and pretends that he is ill. Of course at the end of the play he is found out and spurned by both sides. It makes good comedy, but is rather too topical for the present day. The conditions to which it refers no longer exist.

All the leading Irish members of Parliament, both Nationalist and Unionist, came to see *The Eloquent Dempsey*, eager to find out who it was in particular that Boyle had taken for his model. Each one of the Nationalists was quite sure that it must be his neighbour, never himself, though really it might almost

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

have been any of them. All through the play Dempsey uses the stock phrases that were the sacred commonplaces of the Nationalist platform. There were references to "the Irish wolf-dog" and to "the round tower at sunset," but the one that aroused most laughter was "the day is not far distant when Home Rule shall," etc.—a phrase that used to be invariably trotted out at every Nationalist meeting. A councillor at Dundalk the next week happened to start his oration with it, and the unfortunate man couldn't understand the hilarious shouts of "Eloquent Dempsey" with which it was greeted or why his effort was ruined. One effect of the play was that the politicians had to set to work and invent themselves a new set of *clichés*.

The fact that nearly all our players were now free in the daytime—Frank had decided to turn professional as well—made it possible for me to get ready the plays much more rapidly. Not only was there more time, but the actors were always fresh for rehearsal instead of tired out after a day's work, which made them work much faster. By the middle of February, in spite of all the changes in the cast, we had five plays ready, including a new one by Lady Gregory called *Hyacinth Halvey*, which, as I have said before, I shall always maintain is the best of her one-act pieces. It is about the same length as *Spreading the News*, but there is more in it and the characterisation is subtler. The post-mistress at Clune and the priest's housekeeper were played by Sara Allgood and Brigit O'Dempsey, and it is much to their credit that,

THE ABBEY

though neither of them was yet twenty years of age, they looked the parts of middle-aged women to perfection—Miss Allgood in a cape she had borrowed from her aunt, and Miss O'Dempsey in a beaded dolman with a bonnet to match. Fardy Farrell, the telegraph boy, gave Arthur Sinclair an opportunity for his easy comedy of which he took full advantage. Frank played to perfection an innocent Hyacinth who is a "softy" but has his share of cunning. It was a new type for our players. I had the part of Mr. Quirke, the purveyor of meat that is locally described as of "God's own killing," and Walter McGee played the police sergeant.

In February we managed to let Wexford and Dundalk see something of our work. In Wexford we played for two nights at the old Theatre Royal, which, I should think, was one of the last theatres to retain an apron stage with practical doors on either side of the proscenium. Our programme was *Riders to the Sea*, *Kathleen ni Houliban* and, as the meat in the sandwich, *The Eloquent Dempsey*. We did not badly either from the artistic or financial point of view, and ensured for ourselves a hearty welcome for the next time. On St. Patrick's night we gave the same programme at Dundalk, William Boyle's own town, where the house was crammed with people eager to spot if they could the original of Dempsey. We had no reason there to complain of lack of enthusiasm, and Boyle had had the happy thought of putting in a few local touches which meant nothing to us but were rapturously applauded by the audience. These visits

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

to Wexford and Dundalk satisfied us that there was a future for a specially trained company that would tour the country, playing a repertoire of Irish plays of the modern kind. This had always been part of our plan for the Irish Players. We were also looking forward to the time when there would be little theatres in Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Galway. There actually was one in Belfast, the Ulster Literary Theatre, which had been inspired by our example and had made such progress that at that time it was a good runner-up to the Abbey, and later indeed almost looked like winning the race. With Rutherford Mayne and the Morrow brothers, the Belfast productions were on a level with our own, but we had the better acting team and the finer playwrights. Playwrights were the Ulster Theatre's weak point. Up to the present their only dramatist of any stature is Mr. St. John Ervine, and this in spite of a number who showed promise thirty years ago. It is a pity that the Ulster movement should never have been helped by any kind of subsidy, public or private, and so should never have been able to acquire a permanent home of its own such as we had at the Abbey. Not long ago a young man who came to the Drama League Summer School at St. Andrews told me that he had started a Gaelic theatre at Galway to which the Free State Government had granted a subsidy of £700 a year to encourage the acting and writing of Gaelic plays. So it is possible that Galway will have its little theatre well established long before the larger towns have even begun to think of such a thing. In his book on the Irish theatre Father

THE ABBEY

Dawson Byrne gives a list of over five hundred little theatres in America that owe their existence to the example set by the Abbey.

During our Spring season we made an interesting experiment. As our patent allowed us to play foreign masterpieces, the directors thought it was time we did something to keep up our privilege. The question was whose play and which. It was not easy to decide, for with a company like ours where, with the exception of Frank and me, there was no one over thirty years of age and some of them not yet twenty (and an Irish twenty is a very unsophisticated one), the range of choice was surprisingly limited. One thing was obvious enough, that the play would have to be a comedy. Someone suggested a Molière, as a classic and good for the schools. Also, it must be a simple comedy. What about *Le Médecin Malgré Lui*? I was quite willing, but pointed out that any translations of Molière I had read were poor stuff, the English being so literal and sticky that it was almost impossible to speak. I ventured to suggest that Synge and I take the best English version of *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* that we could find and rewrite it between us so that it would at least "speak." Then up rose Lady Gregory, and said, "I will go home to Gort this day and I will make a translation in the Galway dialect that I have used in my own plays, and then it will be sure to suit our people." And so she did. When she brought the manuscript it was not a bit like the dead literary English of the standard translations that are used in the schoolroom. It had

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

every bit as much vitality as her *Spreading the News* or *Hyacinth Halvey*, and behind it were all the power and imagination of the world's greatest master of comedy. It was a revelation of what can be done in colloquial dialect.

It was about this same time that we got a valuable addition to our back-stage accommodation. Thanks once more to Miss Horniman's generosity, we acquired a house that adjoined the theatre on the right and which, after being converted by Mr. Holloway, gave us a passage leading from the stage to a scene dock and property room, a comfortable green-room on the ground floor, a manager's office, a wardrobe room and, what we needed very badly, a rehearsal room for use when the stage was occupied by the staff. The green-room was, of course, an ideal place for holding a party whenever Lady Gregory arrived from Gort with one of the famous barm bracks. Many a one of these was devoured there after a dress rehearsal, for there is nothing that can arouse so fine an appetite as three or four hours of rehearsing. After the first night of a play a tidy number of visitors used to find their way there for a cup of tea and a chat about the show.

Whenever we produced a period play the costumes, except when Miss Horniman had been good enough to give them to us, were made of hessian and dyed in a zinc bath on the green-room gas stove. It was a stiff job and a dirty one, especially when there was a lot of material to be dealt with. In those days hessian was 6d. a yard and two yards wide, so that at a cheap rate

THE ABBEY

we could cover a multitude of sins. Once Mrs. Patrick Campbell, seeing one of our girls in an outsize costume of this material, murmured to her gently, "At first sight, darling, you looked as if you were about to give birth to a grand piano." Our peasant clothes were real, and by the time we got our wardrobe room, there was a fair collection gathered from all parts of the country to put into it. One place where we got some really valuable old clothes was a pawnshop in Galway. We had them cleaned and stoved before putting them into stock. One old body-coat I used was over ninety years old, and we had some linen shirts with the very high collar attached that had rows of tucks all down the front. The members of the company, too, helped to stock the wardrobe by cadging suitable pieces from their friends and relations.

Our scenery had so accumulated that latterly, before we got our store-room, we could hardly move on to the stage. We had started with only a little for ourselves and a set of stock scenery that I had had made for hiring out to lessees—the traditional kind of thing, an oak chamber, a kitchen set and a wood scene. It would have been useless to offer lessees any of our own stuff, which they did not think was scenery at all, and indeed from their point of view it was not. In the earliest days I had to make it and paint it myself, but presently I got a clever young mechanic to come to us and learn to be a stage carpenter. It would have been easy to get an experienced one—indeed several called on me to ask for the job—but I wanted someone that would grow up with the players and learn to work in

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

our way without having to forget a lot of previous knowledge. Shaun Barlow was very quick and smart with tools, and soon learned not only to make and paint scenery but to take complete charge of every department of the stage. He was one of the best stage carpenters I have ever had to work with, and I have had to work with a few in forty years. As far as I know he is still at the Abbey, sole survivor of the original team.

Le Médecin Malgré Lui, or *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, as we rather clumsily called it, went exceedingly well in Lady Gregory's version. I remember one evening, at one of the most amusing passages, some of the audience laughed in a way which nearly made me forget my lines, and it takes something to do that at any time. A comedian soon gets sensitive to the different qualities of laughter. As a general rule it comes in a single note from the whole house, but sometimes it may start in the gallery and come down the house to the stalls, or it may begin in the stalls and gradually spread until the whole house takes it up. But in any case its common quality is sophistication. It is the laughter of people who know the world and its ways. It has not the frankness, the gaiety and spontaneity that you find in a child's laughter. Yet that was just the quality of the laughter on the occasion of which I am speaking, and it was genuinely disconcerting, simply because it was so delightful. I have never heard it but once again, and that was at the dress rehearsal of *The O'Flynn* at His Majesty's Theatre in London. It came from the box in which Miss Viola

THE ABBEY

Tree was sitting. If the average audience could laugh like that comedians would never stop acting until they were ninety years old.

As it was now getting too far into the season for us to expect a continuance of good business at the Abbey, the directors thought that we might profitably add some new towns in Great Britain to our touring list; and, after consulting with Miss Horniman, we decided to visit Manchester and Liverpool and possibly Leeds. As before, Miss Horniman acted as our advance agent and arranged for us to be at the Midland Theatre, Manchester, the St. George's Hall, Liverpool, and, thanks to a guarantee from the Leeds Art Club, at the Albert Hall, Leeds. We were to play two nights in each place. We crossed over to Manchester on a Sunday. In the boat with us were Sir Herbert Tree's company returning to England, with whom we naturally fraternised. Among them was Mr. Alfred Wareing, Sir Herbert's publicity manager. Mr. Wareing, being a man always interested in new ideas in the theatre, was attracted to our work. He and I had a long talk. I told him how the Abbey had originated and what I hoped for it in the future, and how we were handicapped in the matter of touring by the difficulty of booking dates. No one in the English theatrical world outside of London seemed to know anything about the new kind of Irish play or that they were all played by Irish people. My rebuff when I tried to get into the theatres at Oxford and Cambridge was a case in point. Mr. Wareing thereupon made a proposal. The tour that he was at the moment look-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

ing after for Sir Herbert Tree was coming to an end in a few weeks, and then the company were having a holiday during which he would be free to do other work. He was sure that he could open some dates for us at first-class theatres in towns where he was known, and his position with Tree would make his recommendation doubly strong. The upshot was that on my advice Miss Horniman got into touch with Mr. Wareing, and she made with him an arrangement that was to take effect as soon as our present short tour was finished. In the meantime he was to get as many towns booked as possible before joining us in Dublin.

Our programme was fairly representative of our repertoire—*In the Shadow of the Glen*, *Spreading the News*, *A Pot of Broth*, *Riders to the Sea* and *The Building Fund*. After much persuasion and very much against his will, we had persuaded Arthur Darley to come with us, and give the English public a chance of hearing some examples of his art. He hated the idea of touring, never having done such a thing before, but he bore it well, and we benefited greatly by having him with us. Every night, after the show and supper were finished, he would bring his fiddle into the smoke-room of the hotel we were staying at, and there play tune after tune of unknown airs that he had collected in his travels through Ireland. When he thought he had given us enough music he would make imitations of animals by using his bow on the strings below the bridge. The Manchester newspapers were kind and did all they could to fill the house for us. It was while we were

THE ABBEY

there that we first met in the flesh C. E. Montagu of the *Manchester Guardian*, to whom we had long been indebted for his generous encouragement on our earlier English visits. Frank and he became very close friends, and afterwards, whenever a company that Frank was playing with came near Manchester, he and Montagu were sure to meet for an intensive discussion of the drama from Sophocles to Bernard Shaw.

At Liverpool we were not so successful in attracting audiences, for the hall where we played was not in a good location. However, what the audiences lacked in numbers they made up in warmth, and, as at Manchester, the newspapers were our good friends. As for Leeds, we could not have gone there had it not been for the guarantee of the Arts Club. This made us nervous. Yet, as things turned out, there was little ground for our misgivings. The novelty of our performance ensured us a cordial welcome, and the news of what we had done in Manchester and Liverpool had travelled before us. We returned to Dublin very cheery about our prospects in the more ambitious tour that was shortly to follow.

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGHOUT May we were very busy getting everything ready for the grand tour under Alfred Wareing's direction. There was a lot of work to be done and, as usual in the theatre, little time for it. The Abbey scenery would not suit the theatres we were going to, and in any case it was too flimsy to stand the wear and tear of touring. We had to make a complete new outfit. Of course most theatres had some stock scenery available, but a kitchen scene 18 feet high by 36 feet wide, with huge beams painted all over it in the conventional manner to hide its height, was no use to us. All our cottage scenes were the exact dimensions of an Irish cottage—12 feet high in front, sloping down to 8 feet at the back wall, 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. To mask a set of these dimensions our proscenium opening could not be more than 19 feet by 12, hence we had to take with us very large "masking-in" curtains, for we should be playing on stages which might have the proscenium opening as much as 40 feet by 30. We were the first company of players to travel scenery of correct dimensions for small interiors and to mask in the proscenium openings to fit them. It cost some trouble, but it was worth it, for it is the only way by which the atmosphere of an intimate play can be preserved. Some of the actors were a little dubious, thinking that the masking might interfere with the visibility of our stage from the back of a high gallery; but I have proved that my planning was sound. Provided a scene is never set more than

THE ABBEY

twelve feet back from the footlights, the lines of sight will be correct for every part of the house, even to the highest gallery. I have always taken care that the man in the last seat in the gallery shall both hear and see what he has paid his money for.

There was another matter, too, that we had never had to bear in mind on previous tours. We were now going to play in first-class theatres, which, in accordance with professional practice, meant that our contracts provided for a heavy penalty upon us if by any chance we failed to perform on any of the booked dates. This, in turn, meant that every part in every one of our plays had to be understudied in case of the principal being unable to appear. With a repertoire of seven plays this was not easy, especially as the additional players we were taking as understudies had all to be not only amateurs but people who would not mind being absent from Dublin for five weeks. Here again we had to draw upon all the tact and persuasiveness we could muster. We managed somehow to assemble a sufficient number of young people by giving the most solemn undertakings to their anxious parents that they would be returned safe and sound. Mr. Wareing placed a large order with Allens, the Belfast people, for special posters and other matter for the tour. Elaborate programmes were drawn up, outlining the history of the Abbey Theatre from its origin, giving full notes on the plots and sources of the plays and biographical details of the authors and actors. Though neither an author nor an actor, Arthur Darley had a long paragraph to himself telling all about his

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

work as a collector of Irish folk music. In addition there was a little book throw-away containing portraits of the actors and photographs of some of the scenes.

The tour opened at the Theatre Royal, Cardiff, on May 27th, with the same programme as we had given on the previous tour, plus *Hyacinth Halvey*. The company was in great fettle, as naturally they had all the parts absolutely pat. I was glad to be once more in a proper theatre, where there was the usual staff to work the stage and everybody knew his job. In spite of lamentably fine weather we did an excellent week's business. Wareing's advance publicity had clearly told. Our next move was to Glasgow, where we played at the King's Theatre and again did well. We had very discriminating notices from all the Glasgow newspapers, including even *The Glasgow Herald*, which in those days had the reputation of being hard to please. It was interesting to note the different line taken by the Scottish critics from that to which we had been accustomed. They seemed to be interested in our movement rather than in our plays. From Glasgow we went to Aberdeen, and thence to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where, at the Tyne Theatre, we found the largest stage in England outside Drury Lane. Our tiny sets looked rather comic upon it—almost as if the stage carpenter was trying out the model of a set he was going to make. We could not use more than one-seventh of the available acting area, and to mask-in the mighty proscenium opening took every scrap of curtain we possessed. Of course a stage of that size has always an auditorium to match, and I was

THE ABBEY

more than anxious about how our young actors would get their voices heard in every part. They had had some experience at Glasgow, for the King's is a large house, but this Tyne Theatre was considerably larger. I was proud, as well as relieved, to find that Frank's training proved effective. The voices were as beautifully audible as ever they were at home in the tiny Abbey Theatre.

Back to the North again to face the most critical audience in the kingdom, not excepting London, at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, and here our Celtic relationship was recognised. The playing of Arthur Darley was heard by an audience that was able to appreciate his traditional Irish music at its true value, and the plays were well received because of their novelty and freshness. *The Scotsman* and other papers paid high tributes to the acting. Our next town, and the last one of the tour, was Hull, where again we aroused something like enthusiasm and made a very gratifying conclusion. It was with great regret that we said good-bye to the Wareings on the Saturday night. Our tour had come to an end just as we were beginning to enjoy it and everything was running smoothly. Artistically it had been an unqualified success. It is true that the financial returns were not so satisfactory, for we had had bad theatre weather—that is, notably fine and warm weather—and it was late in the season for any tour. But the loss was slight, for we had our salary list reduced to a minimum, and, as a set-off against it, we had opened many possible future bookings that might have remained closed to

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

us for years to come. Though the audiences had not been uniformly large they had been appreciative, and the Press everywhere had shown a lively interest in the idea of a National Theatre that we were there to express.

Altogether we felt that by means of the tour we had done important work for the future of the company; for it was obvious that if the theatre was to become self-supporting, we must look outside Dublin for our main source of income. Our Dublin audiences were quite good when we played the sort of play they wanted, but scanty enough when we did anything like *The Well of the Saints*. A production that failed to please meant that the next one had to suffer as well, for the public would not come in again until they were assured that the new play was harmless, and by the time they had found that out the week's run was over. If ever we were to be financially independent it could only be by getting better and better dates away where we could be sure of making enough money to cover Dublin deficits. The question of playing through Ireland presented some difficulty, for if we were not accepted by the people in the provinces, there was no use our calling ourselves the National Theatre Company. But in these small towns—for small they are compared with English and Scottish ones—it was not possible to play for more than two nights at a time, and the receipts would not more than cover the current expenses even if they did that. Our capital was so small that we could not afford to lose on our performances except very occasionally when some sacrifice was necessary for propaganda purposes. We did well

THE ABBEY

enough at Longford that year, for the news of our various tours had preceded us and there was a certain amount of curiosity about our plays and actors. Playing in Ireland always brought out points that were lost upon English audiences. It was a strange position, for, while we would always rather play in Ireland for the native understanding of the plays, we had bigger audiences and made far more money elsewhere.

In October we began with two new plays—a one-act tragedy by Lady Gregory, and a three-act play by William Boyle, while as an additional attraction we were able to engage a small orchestra, as Arthur Darley could not stay with us this season. Another change that we had been contemplating for a long time, but hitherto had been unable to afford, was to reserve a portion of the theatre for sixpenny seats. The departure is celebrated by Miss Winifred Letts in *Songs of Leinster* with a poem called "For Sixpence." Here follow three verses from it :

For Sixpence I have been to Tir-Na-N-oge
(No more I had to pay)
And looked my fill at Kings and Gods and Fools—
May God be with the day.

And all for sixpence I have heard fine talk
From playboys, rogues and tramps,
And so forgot the east wind in the streets,
The fog, the dim-eyed lamps.

Sixpence the passport to this splendid world,
Enchanted, sad or gay.
And you the playboy of them all I saw
For sixpence—William Fay.

The Gaol Gate was Lady Gregory's first tragedy,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and, short as it is, the poignancy of the story never fails for a moment. It is written in a lyrical prose, and has a "caoine" composed for it by Arthur Darley that was beautifully chanted by Miss O'Neill. Miss Allgood had a great opportunity as the old mother, Mary Cashel, who is waiting for news of her boy that is to be hanged. It is one of the best of her character parts. Frank played the only other part, the gate-keeper. It is a wonderful little piece and I always think that Lady Gregory was happiest in writing these one-act plays, where she had to concentrate her material into half an hour or less. They certainly have a power and quality that are lacking in her longer works. Boyle's play, *The Mineral Workers*, was his first attempt at really serious drama. He dealt with the struggle against inertia that an enthusiast is bound to encounter when he tries to get country people to change their settled habits. Miss Allgood broke new ground in her aristocratic part, and so did Arthur Sinclair, who played Sir Thomas Musgrove.

During this month Granville Barker produced at the Court Theatre, London, Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. It had been intended, I believe, as a contribution to the Abbey repertoire, but it had presented so many difficulties that nothing was done about it, and Mr. Shaw had given it to the Vedrenne-Barker management. While it was running at the Court I was sent over to London to see, by watching a performance, if I could think of some way that would make it possible for us to do it at the Abbey. I came to the conclusion that our company could not do it adequately in their present circumstances. Their

THE ABBEY

experience was far too limited. To my thinking the play depends on having a Broadbent who can carry the weight of it, for without him it is *Hamlet* without the Prince. Besides, he must both look and sound English, and we had nobody who could do that. Similarly, we had nobody who could take the part of the Cockney valet, Hodson. In Frank I had a splendid Keegan, but I had no Larry. The rest of the cast I might have managed, though my people were really too young for the parts. Rather reluctantly I had to advise against attempting the play.

J. M. Kerrigan joined us this autumn. He proved a precious addition to our strength, as he fitted in between Arthur Sinclair and Joe O'Rourke, and could play both juveniles and comedy character parts—an unusual combination. He, Fred O'Donovan, and the late Sydney Morgan, with Sara Allgood, Maire O'Neill, Arthur Sinclair and J. A. O'Rourke made up the company of Irish players that became famous all over the world. Like others, Kerrigan went to America later. The last time I saw him he was playing in a film with John McCormack. He was another with the hobby for collecting street-ballads, and I hope he has found some means of getting his collection printed, for it was well worth it.

A further new-comer at this time gives me less satisfaction to speak of in this respect, though that was not her fault—for she was a most capable actress—but the fault of the directors, who, by a curious lapse of judgment, insisted on engaging her specially to play the leading part in Mr. Yeats's verse play *Deirdre*. I refer to Miss Darragh. She had recently

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

had several striking successes in London, notably in *The Walls of Jericho* by the late Alfred Sutro. Sara Allgood or Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh could, either of them, have done the part admirably, but, though accomplished in the Abbey way, they were not, as the jargon goes, "experienced" actresses in those days. There was no West End sophistication about their work. Now, Mr. Yeats had got it into his head that his Deirdre must be experienced and sophisticated as well as Irish, and the only person who could fill the bill according to his notions was Miss Darragh. Well, I can't say she did not get plenty of applause. The public and the Press voted her magnificent. She was manifestly a highly trained professional, the like of which was not among us. But in my eyes it was just this manifestness that ruined the show. It did not fit with our technique, which, for all its lack of obviousness, had been slyly planned so as to get a special effect out of special material. It was like putting a Rolls Royce to run in a race with a lot of hill ponies up the Mountains of Mourne, bogs and all. The ponies, knowing each inch of the way, could outpace the Rolls every time. On the one hand, Miss Darragh made our company look young and simple, and, on the other hand, their youth and simplicity made her look as if she were over-acting. When the wandering musicians, Sara Allgood, Maire O'Neill and Brigit O'Dempsey, chanted the lyrics set to music by Arthur Darley, their artless young voices made Deirdre's sound tired and strident by contrast. For once I found myself in agreement with some of the

THE ABBEY

critics, who, for all their enthusiasm for Miss Darragh, suggested that she was mis-cast and out of her element among the Abbey players.

In addition to the artistic *gaffe* her engagement involved some degree of heartburning among the permanent members of the company. Owing to her professional standing she had to be paid a substantial salary, likewise to be specially advertised; and naturally the others, whose salaries were only a fraction of hers, and who never in their lives had any special advertising, felt aggrieved seeing that they had done all the donkey work. Thus, even if the experiment had been artistically fortunate, it would scarcely have been justified, for it introduced several of the very things our movement existed to oppose—such as the “star” system and the grading of artists.

However, always and everywhere “the play’s the thing,” and there can be no denying that Mr. Yeats’s verse *Deirdre* went over as handsomely as had “Æ’s” prose one. The audiences applauded enthusiastically, and the Press hailed it as the best of Mr. Yeats’s verse plays. The fact that it was not in any way mystical, but a straightforward treatment of a favourite story from the great epic of the Red Branch, helped to make it popular, for the publication of *Gods and Fighting Men* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* by Lady Gregory had lately aroused in the Irish people a fresh interest in the early history of their country. This was the first verse play that gave us the feeling that the audience was with us and really liked it, and there were signs that with time and trouble Frank’s scheme for a verse-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

speaking company was a possibility in the near future. We were hopeful in those days.

Miss Darragh did not remain with us long. Her second and last part at the Abbey was Dectora, in a revised (but not, as I venture to think, improved) version of Mr. Yeats's *Shadowy Waters*. She then returned to London, and shortly after went to Liverpool, where she founded the first repertory theatre in Great Britain. This Liverpool Repertory had not much luck in its earlier years, for, among other handicaps, it presently had to contend very unequally with the brilliant rival started in Manchester by the indefatigable Miss Horniman. Yet Miss Horniman's Manchester Repertory is now no more, while the Liverpool Repertory, under the admirable direction of Mr. William Armstrong, is an established institution of the British theatre.

Along with the new version of *Shadowy Waters* we produced *The Canavans*, a farcical comedy in three acts by Lady Gregory, which did not show the dramatist at her best. On the whole our closing programme for 1906 was hardly up to the average. Nevertheless, taking it all round, we had put in a creditable year's work. We had produced seven new plays and toured for more than ten weeks, securing future dates at eight theatres where we reckoned on doing better business every time we visited them. At the end of October I managed to dash over to Glasgow for a week-end, and in Shamrock Street of happy omen was married to Brigit O'Dempsey. For me, at any rate, 1906 was a successful year, the most successful of my life hitherto.



MRS. W. G. FAY

CHAPTER IX

I WISH I could say the same for 1907, the year that proved as stormy in my fortunes as its predecessor had been prosperous, for it began with the historic uproar over *The Playboy of the Western World* and ended with the departure of the Fays from the Abbey Theatre and from Ireland.

I often hear it said that a really great artist is unmoved by the howl of the rabble and goes on producing his work as he pleases, confident that the future will vindicate him. This is true only with some qualification. Great artists have shown magnificent examples of courage in the face of popular hostility, but that is not to say that they have not felt deeply wounded by it, and their resentment is often reflected in their work. A classic case is that of Thomas Hardy, who after *Jude the Obscure* retired from the struggle and devoted the rest of his life to poetry. But not every author, certainly not many young ones, can take the course of dignity and silence. The temptation to hit back is strong, and among those who have yielded to it we find J. M. Synge. He could not forgive the crass ignorance, the fatuity, the malevolence with which *The Well of the Saints* had been received. He had given of his best in good faith, and offence had been taken where no offence had been intended. "Very well, then," he said to me bitterly one night, "the next play I write I will make sure will annoy them." And he did. As soon as I cast eyes over the script of *The Playboy of the Western World* I knew we

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

were in for serious trouble unless he would consent to alter it drastically. Many and many a time I strove with him, using all the arguments I could muster, to get him to see that if you attack your audience you must expect them to retaliate, that you might as well write to a newspaper and expect the editor not to insist on the last word. The emotions displayed on the stage are designed by the author and interpreted by the players to give the audience a vicarious experience of them, and if the audience reacts to them, that is the measure of the author's and actors' success. Thus, laughter on the stage makes laughter in the house and anger makes anger. But by laughter I mean straight laughter, not wrath disguised in a grin which the average audience is quick to see through and resent accordingly. Synge could never be made to understand that. He was apt to think in the terms of Zola, who got his effects by keeping all his characters in one key. He could never see that Zola was a novelist, not a dramatist, and that there is all the difference between a printed story that one reads to oneself and the same story told as a play to a mixed audience of varying degrees of intelligence. Frank and I begged him to make Pegeen a decent likeable country girl, which she might easily have been without injury to the play, and to take out the torture scene in the last act where the peasants burn Christy with the lit turf. It was no use referring him to all the approved rules of the theatrical game—that, for example, while a note of comedy was admirable for heightening tragedy, the converse was not true.

THE ABBEY

The things that we wanted him to alter did not amount to five per cent. of the whole play. *The Well of the Saints* had suffered from too much anger. *The Playboy of the Western World* was anger *in excelsis*. The characters were as fine and diverting a set of scallywags as one could invent for one story, but it was years too soon for our audiences to appreciate them as dramatic creations.

Frank and I might as well have saved our breath. We might as well have tried to move the Hill of Howth as move Synge. That was his play, he said, and, barring one or two jots and tittles of "bad language" that he grudgingly consented to excise, it was the play that with a great screwing up of courage we produced.

I gave the *Playboy* long and careful rehearsal, doing my best to tone down the bitterness of it, and all the time with a sinking heart. I knew we were in for trouble, but it was my business to get Synge's play produced as nearly to his notions as possible in the circumstances and with the material at my disposal. All through the first act the play went splendidly, and I was beginning to feel hopeful, even cheerful. The second act, too, opened to plenty of laughter. We had not got to the beginning of the "rough stuff." But with the entrance of the Widow Quin the audience began to show signs of restlessness. Obviously they couldn't abide her; and when we came to my line about "all bloody fools," the trouble began in earnest, with hisses and cat-calls and all the other indications that the audience are not in love with

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

you. Now that word "bloody" in the script had given me qualms, but Synge had insisted—and who was I to contradict him?—that in the West it was the casual mild expletive, like "bally," or "beastly," or "bloomin'." Yet how was Dublin to know that? In Dublin, as for that matter all over England and Scotland in those days, it was a "low" word, a pothouse word. Quite a lot of years later, even, it provided the theatrical sensation of the London season when Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle rapped it out in *Pygmalion*. Nowadays, I understand, it is so much a young lady's expression that no he-man ever dreams of using it. Synge was in advance of his time. There was therefore some excuse for the audience's protest, though it was needlessly violent. Yet the queer thing was that what turned the audience into a veritable mob of howling devils was not this vulgar expletive, but as irreproachable a word as there is in the English dictionary—the decent old-fashioned "shift" for the traditional under-garment of a woman. There is a point in the play where Christy (which in this case was poor me) says, "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World." You may say that the image—a magnificent one, mark you—must have been shocking to so unsophisticated an audience as ours, but it was not the image that shocked them. It was the word, for the row was just as bad when Pegeen Mike herself said to the Widow Quin, "Is it you asking for a penn'orth

THE ABBEY

of starch, with ne'er a shift or a shirt as long as you can remember?"

The last act opened with the house in an uproar, and by the time the curtain fell, the uproar had become a riot. Two or three times I tried to get them to let us finish for the sake of those who wanted to hear the play, but it was no use. They wanted a row and they were going to have one. There were free fights in the stalls. Mr. Hillis, our conductor, got his face damaged, and at one time it seemed as if the stage would be stormed. It was lucky for themselves that the patriots did not venture as far as that, for our call-boy, who was also boiler attendant and general factotum, had armed himself with a big axe from the boiler-room, and swore by all the saints in the calendar that he would chop the head off the first lad who came over the footlights. And knowing him, I haven't a shadow of doubt that he would have chopped.

This was on a Saturday night. Over Sunday the directors had to consider whether they would bow to the storm and withdraw the play, or face it out. Very properly they took the courageous course, and the company, though it was no joke for them, loyally supported their decision to go on playing at all costs. And so on the Monday night the curtain was rung up to a well-organised pandemonium, for the patriots had been busy over the week-end also. As it was impossible for any of us to be heard, I arranged with the cast that we should simply walk through the play, not speaking a word aloud, but changing positions

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and going through all the motions, so to speak. The noise was terrific, but we finished the play. It was not until the Thursday night that, in order to give a fair deal to those who had paid their money to hear, the directors had the police in the theatre. We also had taken the precaution to pad the floor with felt, which frustrated the rhythmic stamping that had been the opposition's most effective device. Thus we were able once more to speak the lines, but our reputation as an Irish national institution was ruined. Not content with libelling the saintly Irish people, we had actually called in the tyrant Saxon's myrmidons to silence their righteous indignation! Of course the root of the trouble was that Synge had written a brilliant play about the Irish peasantry without any of the traditional sentiment or illusions that were then so dear to the Irish playgoer. He was accused of making a deliberate attack on the national character, whatever that may be. Even William Boyle was among the angriest of angry, though he had to confess that he had not seen the play but had only read the reports of the hubbub in the newspapers. To mark his loathing of us he withdrew all his plays, which I think was ungrateful, considering all we had done for him.

The uproar, of course, was not confined to the theatre. It re-echoed, with terrific amplification, in the Press, and Dublin in those days was peculiarly rich in organs of public opinion which ordinarily made a discordant chorus, but now were enabled to bray all together in something that was almost harmony.

THE ABBEY

One or two writers ventured to "praise with faint damns," but damning of some sort was *de rigueur*. Arthur Griffith was particularly venomous, and ~~incidentally managed to make an ass of himself~~. He declared that "shift" and "bloody" were not the worst of Synge's verbal offences, that he and several friends present with him would take their Bible oath that another word, a nauseating word, a ~~cloacine~~ word was used. On being confronted with the script he had to admit (which he did with a very ill grace) that, in his eagerness to hear evil, he had misheard a perfectly innocent and commonplace word that sounds a little like it. Even more discreditable than this flight of imagination was his attack on the Abbey Theatre as an anti-Irish institution financed by English money, which was his agreeable way of describing Miss Horniman's generosity. The strictures of the dramatic critics and the fulminations of the leader-writers were followed up by the hysterics of the correspondence columns. Most of the letters were incredibly funny, though at the time we could not be expected to appreciate their humour. There was, for example, "A Girl from the West," from whom I cannot help quoting a sentence :

Every character uses coarse expressions, and Miss Allgood (one of the most charming actresses I have ever seen) is forced to use a word indicating an essential item of female attire which the lady would probably never utter in ordinary circumstances even to herself.

So you see the difficulties that beset a respectable Irishwoman when she goes into a shop to buy a

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

chemise! It was this sort of nonsense that inspired the following verses in the *Dublin Evening Mail*. I have never definitely ascertained the authorship, but I suspect the late Susan Mitchell, "Æ's" secretary.

THE BLUSHES OF IRELAND

Oh really, Mr. Yeats (or Yates),
Oh really really, William Butler,
Your language fairly beats (or bates)
A Saxon sutler.

You're quite too dense to understand
The chill—the thrill—of modest loathing
With which one hears on Irish land
Of underclothing.

Allusions to a flannel shirt
(Young man, remember this, I urge 'ee)
Afflict with agonising hurt
Our patriot clergy.

And you, sir, you and Mr. Synge,
In spite of virtue's no-surrender,
You go and make the shameful thing
Of female gender.

Oppressor! thrust us to the Wall,
Bid bravo bobbies beat us yellow,
We'll raise an *Independent* bawl,
A *Freeman's* bellow.

We tell you to your brazen face,
A score of brogues in concord lifted,
That Ireland never was a place
Where clothes were sh—fted.

You come, sir, with your English ways,
Your morals of the Cockney cabby,
Corrupting with unseemly phrase
The Abbey babby.

THE ABBEY

Unless we watch your wanton text,
And waken shame with boos and knockings,
You'll want that poor Miss Allgood next
To mention st—ck—ngs.

Unless we curb from hour to hour
This frenzied cult of Aphrodite,
You'll urge reluctant Ambrose Power
To name his n—ghty.

We'll shriek—we'll faint—we won't be mute
Until we've forced you to elimi-
nate that vile word, and substitute
The chaster sh—mmy.

And, look, sir, do not sh—ft your scenes—
There's scandal aided and abetted.
Let them now virtue intervenes
Be chemisetted.

Yield Willie! else your day is done,
Boyles will break out, and health desert you;
The little Fays your doors will shun
In wounded virtue.

We played *The Playboy* for the full number of advertised performances, matinée included. There was a debate conducted by Mr. Yeats in the theatre on the following Monday, when both sides were given an opportunity of stating their views, but it was a rather futile meeting, I think. The incident was a lamentable business from every point of view, as the future proved. If it taught the public that they could not dictate the policy of the theatre, that was all. However, you cannot beat the public in the end, as I had warned Synge and the other directors, because they can always boycott you. And that was what happened after *The Playboy*. For weeks on end we had to play to five or ten shillings a night—

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

a full programme to half a dozen people scattered all over the house. I used to invite them all into the stalls to sit together. You can play serious plays to a scattered audience, but you cannot play comedy unless somebody laughs, and people do not laugh unless they are sitting together. I lost friends who never forgave me for producing the play and myself taking the leading part, and who could not, or would not understand that it was my job to produce any play that my directors wanted, quite apart from my personal likes or dislikes. All our hard work from the November of the previous year was forgotten—all the previous plays that we had produced to the general delight. Where actors are concerned the public has a very short memory.

One thing that made Synge's plays difficult for a ~~Dublin audience was that he actually~~ knew the people he was writing about, whereas they only thought they did. One could get a fairly accurate and just criticism of a Gaelic play from anyone who spoke the language, for such a person had first-hand knowledge of the peasant. But I don't suppose half a dozen people in Dublin could have told you the difference in idiom and brogue between a man from the glens of Antrim and a man from Waterford, or between a Galway man and a Wicklow one. I myself knew these distinctions in a rough-and-ready way owing to my experience as a stroller and I knew how right Synge was. Time has justified him, for his dialect is now the standard one and is even used by Eugene O'Neill in America. And not only did

THE ABBEY

the Dubliners fail to appreciate Synge's profound knowledge of rural Ireland, but they completely misunderstood the character of the man. He was popularly imagined as an outlandish ogre, actuated by hatred of the human race in general and of the Irish race in particular, and both willing to wound and unafraid to strike. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Synge would never willingly have hurt anybody. He was one of the gentlest souls that ever breathed, and beloved by everybody who knew him. I never knew him lose his temper even in the most trying circumstances, and he was always full of jokes and good-humour that made even a long night journey on tour—and that is a severe test for anyone—a pleasure instead of the penance that it usually is.

He was a bit of a Quixote too. I remember, when I was living in High Street, Synge and I one night were walking through one of the roughest of the back streets when we heard the screams of a woman and child coming from behind the shutters of a tumbledown shop and a man's voice shouting and swearing. Synge stopped at once and wanted to go to the rescue. Knowing the quarter I warned him that we should get a rough house if we interfered, but that did not stop him. He began hammering away at the door, the screams getting louder and louder all the time. As he got no reply to his knocking we put our shoulders to the door, and with a combined push smashed it in. It was pitch dark inside but Synge managed to grab the woman while

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

I grabbed the baby, and we got them out. Not content with that we dashed back to the shop and yanked the man out of the house into the street also. He swore powerfully, and was at first inclined to show fight, but a short arm from Synge, planted nicely under his chin, knocked him up against the wall and reduced him to a comparatively reasonable frame of mind. The mother and child were put back into the shop and told to lock the door. Then we walked the man down the street between us, intending to hand him over to the police, but on the way Synge suddenly changed his mind and chased him off instead. After that he resumed the discussion of the first principles of dramatic construction as if nothing had happened. Next day, as I was passing along the same street, I saw the man and his wife sitting on a stool by their door laughing and joking while the infant played at their feet!

I think the only really bright spot in this melancholy year was the production in March of *The Rising of the Moon*. I will not say it is Lady Gregory's best, or even second-best, but it is very good, and it has a real "rebelly" theme that immediately endeared it to the great heart of Ireland and did something towards placating our political "friends." It subsequently became as much a stand-by to the Abbey as *A Pot of Broth* had been. I played the ballad singer (and sang songs, I regret to say!). Arthur Sinclair was the sergeant and J. O'Rourke and J. Kerrigan the two policemen.

I now turn to less pleasant matters that developed



J. M. SYNGE, from a drawing by J. B. Yeats

THE ABBEY

about this time. Notwithstanding the *Playboy* trouble, taking things by and large, the Abbey players had done uncommonly well. They hadn't made money but they had established themselves as the representatives of a forward movement in the drama that could not be ignored. Naturally there was nobody more pleased with our *succès d'estime* than Miss Horniman. Unfortunately her gratification led her into a disastrous error of judgment. Seeing we were doing so well and yet suffered from some faults due to our amateur origins, she took the notion that all we needed to make us perfect was a real stiffening of professional direction such as in her opinion only England could supply. Accordingly she suggested to the directors—and in the circumstances a suggestion from Miss Horniman was tantamount to a command—that Ben Iden Payne, an extremely capable Lancashire lad, whose work for Benson had greatly impressed her, should temporarily take over the general management of the Abbey and broaden its artistic basis. There was not a little to be said for the idea. It could be argued that by our pre-occupation with Irish plays, especially peasant plays, we were hiding our light under a bushel, and that our technique was capable of a much wider application. Nobody was more sensible of that than I was. But after all we had not been going for so very long, and it would be time enough to be thinking about setting our light on a candlestick when it was burning steadily enough not to be blown out by the blasts of prejudice and ill-will under which it was even now flickering.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

It is bad enough to do the wrong thing, but to do the right thing in the wrong way and at the wrong time is worse. Miss Horniman's move was not only inopportune on general grounds; it was at the moment appallingly bad tactics. Arthur Griffith had flung the gibe that the Abbey Theatre was an anti-national activity financed by English money, and here were we playing into his hands by accepting an English manager and producer. That in itself should have made the directors a *non possumus* to Miss Horniman. But even if the public situation had been less delicate, there were still serious objections. I omit the personal aspect of the matter. Naturally it was not agreeable to me, who had built up the whole concern, to be superseded even temporarily, but that is not the point. The point was, no English manager-producer, however gifted and well-intentioned, could make our actors conform to the model of an ordinary repertory company, which seemed to be the idea. Their technique, such as it was at the time, was the result of the tuition Frank and I had given, combined with the team work that came from constantly playing together. It could not be altered without destroying the very quality that had given us our unique reputation and making it impossible to carry to a successful issue our plans for the future.

None of our directors had enough theatrical experience—or for that matter experience of this wicked world—to realise how difficult it would be for me to remain if a new producer were put in charge. They urged that Payne's appointment would not last long

THE ABBEY

and that as soon as it came to an end I should automatically resume sole control. That sounded very fine, but I knew things would not work out so simply, and that I should never regain my old personal authority over the company. My instinct was to resign, and I said so ; but in the end, and much against the advice of my friends, I was persuaded to remain on the footing that I should produce all the peasant plays, which at the time were the most important side of our work, while Payne produced the others and managed the theatre generally.

Payne, being a man of good sense, could appreciate the manifold difficulties of the situation and fully agreed with me that it would be disastrous for him to play the new broom. His chief care to begin with was to do a little more than we had hitherto been able to manage in the way of contemporary foreign drama. His first production, on March 16th, was Maeterlinck's *Interior*. His methods were very much like my own, and the play succeeded so well that we were able to repeat it three times at the end of the month. Frank and Kerrigan came in for the best of the notices. Kerrigan "loses his own personality and becomes what he represents, and Frank Fay as the old man showed by his way of speaking the infinite age, with a wondering contemplation of sorrow that made his play a marvel of luminous interpretation."

At the end of April came Payne's second production, *Fand*, a two-act play by that gifted but erratic soul, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, founded on a legend of the

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

fairy woman who enticed Cuchulain to the underworld—the Irish Tannhäuser legend in fact. It was written in Alexandrines, and so gave the company some excellent material on which to practise the speaking of verse, but it had a poor reception except from the faithful few who enjoyed good verse-speaking. After that we once more toured Great Britain, and for the first time visited Birmingham. The Birmingham critics were by no means kind, a novel experience for us in England. They could not make us out at all. However, our visit had one very good result. It inspired Barry Jackson and some of his friends to imitate us and found the “Pilgrim Players,” which developed a few years later into the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. In London, where we played at the Great Queen Street (now the Kingsway) Theatre, we had some anonymous letters threatening trouble if we dared to present *The Playboy*, and there was even a half-hearted attempt at a demonstration at the first performance. But it fizzled out, as the audience showed very plainly that they were determined not to be disturbed by a few rowdies. This was the first time we had an opportunity of putting the play before a sophisticated audience that simply judged it as a play and were able to see in it a splendid addition to our repertoire. Nobody could understand what all the fuss had been about in Dublin. Synge had a great reception when he took his curtain call, and if the critics did find some weak spots in the play they freely recognised its importance as a contribution to the modern drama.

THE ABBEY

Iden Payne did not return to Dublin with us. He had early realised in what a false position he had been placed, and that in any case the Abbey was trying to achieve something that was not at all in his line. So when we reached London he sent in his resignation. Soon afterwards he went to Manchester to produce for Miss Horniman at her new venture, the Gaiety Repertory Theatre, where, among many brilliant players who began their careers at that time under his direction, were Sybil Thorndike, Lewis Casson and Basil Dean. When the War put an end to most repertory work in this country, he went to America to become director of drama at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh. He has recently been appointed director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon.

When Payne left us I took full charge once more, but I persuaded the directors to lighten my duties by appointing Ernest Vaughan, one of the old members of the Ormond Dramatic Society, to be business manager, while I devoted myself to production and acting. As heaven decreed it was little enough I was to do of either, and of that little nothing that was really memorable. George Fitzmaurice's three-act play, *The Country Dressmaker*, with which we opened our autumn season, had considerable merit, and Lady Gregory gave us *Devorgilla*, founded on the incident that brought about the English conquest of Ireland, which had no more than a very fair success. However, it was better than the play that was destined to be my last production at the Abbey Theatre—*The*

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Unicorn from the Stars, by Lady Gregory and Mr. Yeats. This was a rehash of an earlier play called *Where there is Nothing*, that had been done by the Stage Society and had afterwards been published in Arthur Griffith's paper. It was just the kind of thing where, in my opinion, it is impossible to get good results out of collaboration. Lady Gregory's peasant characters were not good exponents of Mr. Yeats's mysticism, which on this occasion was more than usually tenebrous. Nobody could understand the play then. I doubt if anybody could understand it even now, or at any time. The most interesting and pleasurable feature of the season I can call to mind was the series of "professional matinées" that was started in order that English actors who might be playing in Dublin should have an opportunity of seeing us. Many took advantage of it, among them Sir Herbert Tree, Sir John Martin Harvey, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Sir Frank Benson, Haidee Gunn and William Poel.

I need not dwell at length on the events that ended in my resignation from the Abbey Theatre. They can be stated quite shortly. The consequence of Iden Payne's appointment that I had foreseen and of which I had warned the directors duly came to pass. Although I was nominally in full control again, the old spirit of camaraderie was gone and the company was thoroughly out of hand. Incidents of open insubordination were not infrequent. If I ordered anything that happened not to be to some member's liking, he (or she) would fling off to one

THE ABBEY

or other of the directors with his (or her) grievance, and the chances were that I should be overruled. Now it is important to observe that up to this time not one of us, not even myself, had troubled about having a formal contract in writing with the National Theatre Company, Limited. Artists were engaged by me by word of mouth, and the matter was left at that—not a business-like procedure, I grant you, but one that worked well enough while we were all a happy family. But now that the old spirit was no more it was clear to me that the only way to restore discipline was to conform to strict business practice and to insist on written contracts of service clearly defining the conditions of employment. The contracts would, of course, be between each artist and the National Theatre Company, Limited; but I demanded that one of the conditions should be that no artist was permitted to approach individual members of the Board on any matter touching his work. If anyone had a grievance, let him submit it formally in writing to the Board, who could then take it up with me if they saw fit.

I cannot think that that demand was unreasonable. It was only asking that we should proceed on the basis that every business organisation finds essential to efficiency, and would have been the right thing in any circumstances. But apart from that there was a particular reason that made the change imperative. The Abbey Theatre had reached a critical stage in its development. From the humblest beginnings, and working mainly from a stock-in-trade of little native

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

peasant plays which, with all their merits, represented a very narrow range of human experience, it had made a surprising and gratifying reputation. And here in its very success lay its peril, the insidious temptation to rest content with its little laurels and forget the big ones that had still to be worn. From the first Frank and I had seen in the National Theatre movement the possibility of a real art theatre, and we had been led to believe that the Abbey directors shared our vision. Miss Horniman certainly did, otherwise she would not have backed the movement with her good money, for what was Ireland to her, or she to Ireland? Unfortunately the lavish encomiums of the English Press had been too heady for our friends Yeats, Synge and Augusta Gregory. They imagined we had arrived when we had no more than started. We had a company that could do peasant plays with an accomplishment and finish that have never been rivalled, much less excelled. But we should have to show much more than that before we could claim to be a real art theatre. We should have to create by degrees a company capable, both in numbers and experience, of performing any type of play, whether low life or high life, prose or verse. Frank and I reckoned that this would be a long and hard job—a matter of ten years at least, even with the excellent material we undoubtedly had.

I put these considerations to the directors, pointing out that it would be idle for me to attempt such a task unless I were given the usual power of a manager and producer. Of course it would be possible to

THE ABBEY

muddle through in the old way if we were content to potter along with peasant plays, which would mean first stagnation and ultimately, when we found no more pots of broth to boil and no more news to spread, death. But that was not my idea for the future of the Abbey Theatre. What agitated confabulations the directors held I know not. All I know is that after a few days Lady Gregory came to me to say that they were not disposed to make any changes, and what was I going to do about it? I did the only thing that was left to me—I resigned on the spot.

Frank went with me, and so did Ernest Vaughan. I had hoped Frank would see his way to remain and carry on the excellent work he was doing. He might not have been as happy as of yore, but it was a safe enough job, and safe jobs are not so easily picked up in the theatre. However, he would not hear of it. "I came with you," he said, "and I'll go with you." On January 13th, 1908, I left the Abbey Theatre for the last time, going out a poorer man than I had come in. Shaun Barlow met my wife and me to say good-bye, and the housekeeper said farewell to us in the hall. She said, "I knew I was losing a friend when a tooth fell out on Tuesday."

END OF PART II

PART III
AFTER

CHAPTER I

OUR departure from the Abbey was a nine-days wonder for Dublin, and all sorts of rumours were afloat about the reason for it. There were plenty of facilities for washing dirty linen in public, if we had had any; but our disagreement with the directors was not over the cleanliness of the material but the quality and the proper use of it. Frank and I refused to say anything for publication, for there was nothing we could usefully add to the simple statement made by Mr. Yeats that there had been a difference of opinion about the policy of the theatre, which was a private matter between the directors and me. That was the case in a nutshell. Frank and I had one plan for the development of the theatre and the directors had another they thought better. As between us time alone could tell, and it did. Before very long the directors found that by concentrating on native plays, which to all intents and purposes meant peasant plays, they were arriving at a dead end. Even the Irish public has not an infinite appetite for peasant plays, and even if it had, the supply (saving Lady Gregory's noble presence) could not go on for ever. Maybe peasant drama was the safer and more useful medium on which to concentrate the energies of the theatre, but no theatre on earth could be kept going on a policy of producing nothing but native works, for there are not enough good plays written each year in any country to supply a national theatre in this sense of the term. The whole dramatic output of Europe

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and America combined does not amount to a dozen really good plays annually (there are plenty of competent ones but a truly fine play is rare), and a national theatre lives by quality. Hence the Abbey Theatre directors were ultimately obliged to introduce translations of foreign masterpieces in order to give variety to their programmes; but meanwhile valuable time had been lost.

My wife and I stayed in Dublin only a few days after leaving the Abbey, for I had to find work without delay, and it was no use looking for it in Ireland. We came to London, where William Boyle kindly gave us hospitality. Frank remained behind until he could make up his mind whether to take up teaching or become an ordinary professional.

The only person I knew connected with the theatre was Mr. Granville Barker, whom I had met when I had come over to see if we could produce *John Bull's Other Island*. I knew that if he could he would give me a trial. But he was at that moment producing one of Gilbert Murray's translations from Euripides, and naturally had not much use for a character comedian who left no doubt as to his nationality every time he spoke. With the best will in the world he could do no more than promise to remember me when he had a part for which I was suitable. Presently our Dunmow friends, the Nashes, asked us to come down and see them, and as the last couple of months had been a very trying time, my wife and I were only too glad to exchange the horrors of "looking for work" for a turn of helping with the poultry farm, leaving the

AFTER

noise and bustle of London for the quiet of the country.

We had not been there more than a week when I was astonished and delighted to receive a letter from no less a person than Sir James Barrie inviting me to come and see him at his house at Leinster Corner in the Bayswater Road. When I arrived, the maid took me through the house and across the back garden to where some wooden steps led to what had been at one time the hayloft but was now converted into a study. Near the window at the far end of it stood a very large roll-top desk with a large leather strap and padlock fastened round it to give additional security to its contents. On the opposite wall to the door was an open hearth with a turf fire burning on it and wooden settles on either side. The walls were hung with Samoan mats, the gift of Robert Louis Stevenson.

I sat on one settle and smoked my cherry pipe, while he sat on the opposite one and did likewise with a well-seasoned briar. After getting from me the whole story of our parting from the Abbey, he asked a lot of questions about my own work as an actor. I then found to my astonishment that he had seen every character I had played in our repertoire. How he had managed it I don't know. He must have seen all the plays we produced in London. I recalled an occasion when he came over to Dublin with Charles Frohman to see the first performance of one of his plays, and we had all been hoping that they might visit us also, and be so impressed that Mr. Frohman would want to take the Abbey company for an American tour. But,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in spite of our nightly watch for them, they had never been seen. Now it came out, accidentally in the course of conversation, that they had been there after all. They had slipped into the pit one night and, without being recognised in front or behind, had seen our performance. So there we sat talking about plays and actors till it was time for me to say farewell, and I returned to Dunmow elated at having met the writer who is, to my thinking, the most gifted dramatist of our time.

A week or so after my visit a telegram came from Sir James that I was to call at the Hicks (now the Globe) Theatre and there ask for Mr. Frohman. With my heart in my mouth I came up to town. That foolish propensity we all have for deciding beforehand what a stranger we are about to meet should look like, led me to expect in Mr. Frohman a tall American with a voice as big as his reputation. Instead, I was introduced to a man about my own smallness. There was nothing big about him except the cigar he was smoking. He gave me its fellow, and said he had a proposition for me. He was about to revive *The Admirable Crichton* at the Duke of York's Theatre, and he wanted a curtain-raiser. Would I produce one of our short Irish plays and play in it as well? I could hardly believe my ears. It was only a few weeks since I had landed in England without money or prospects, and here I was being offered a production in a London West End theatre by a man who controlled every first-class theatre in America, as well as many in England! My answer took no time.

AFTER

Terms were to be decided later. I dashed off to wire to Lady Gregory and Mr. Yeats for leave to do *The Rising of the Moon* and *A Pot of Broth*, which was given at once, and to Frank bidding him come over and join us.

This first interview took place on a Monday. On the Wednesday Mr. Frohman sent for me again to announce a complete change of plan. He had decided that *The Admirable Crichton* by itself was quite enough for a full evening's programme, so instead of playing at the Duke of York's I was to go to New York to play a short Irish play in front of a farce called *Twenty Days in the Shade* which was then running at the Savoy Theatre in 34th Street. Could I collect my plays and players and be ready to sail on Saturday? I did some rapid thinking. It left me only two days in which to settle everything, but here was a chance to go to America, given by the head of the theatrical business in that country, and a better start than that was not possible. Without in the least knowing how it could be done I said I would do it. And so all was settled. I was not to trouble about the arrangements for the journey. Frohman's people would see to that. We chatted for a few minutes about things unconnected with the theatre while his secretary was making out a large cheque for me against immediate expenses. Did I like living in London? Did I prefer a flat to a boarding house? Wasn't it pleasanter to live in a quiet street than in a noisy one? Then he signed the cheque and sent me off with cordial good wishes. Nothing he said had been remarkable, but the per-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

sonal power and attraction of Charles Frohman would have got him to the top of any business to which he applied himself, no matter how low his place to start with. That was the impression I carried away with me. I never saw him again.

Boyle said we could never do it, but by spending a small fortune on telegrams I managed to gather the Fay family on the platform at Waterloo for the boat train on Saturday morning. I had a kindly letter from Sir James Barrie wishing us a successful time and hoping that when we returned to England we should play, not in front of one of his plays, but in it. The representative of Mr. Frohman was on the platform with a bunch of flowers for "herself" and all the illustrated papers for Frank and me. He wished us the best of good luck, and off we went.

Bar a nasty knocking about we had on the fourth day out (and even bad crossings of the Irish Channel had not prepared me for the Atlantic roller at its biggest and quickest) the eight-day voyage was pleasant and uneventful. I spent most of my time reading, for there was an excellent library of fiction on board. I used to get a book each morning after breakfast and read it sitting in the sun on big coils of cable in the bow of the ship. After lunch I was ready for a fresh one and read this sitting in my deck chair on the sunny side of the promenade deck. A third one I got before dinner and finished by bedtime. Many years' practice in reading plays in manuscript, typescript or print, makes one an adept at rapid reading, and it must be a long novel indeed

AFTER

that I cannot read in two and a half hours. By the time we came up with the Statue of Liberty I had worked my way through most of the light literature the ship carried.

We reached New York early on the eighth day, a Sunday, and were met by two members of Mr. Frohman's New York staff. One undertook to see our baggage through the Customs, while the other carried us off in a taxi to a small flat in one of the streets that have since been demolished to make room for the Pennsylvania Railway Station. It was just the kind of flat we would have chosen for ourselves, and so was the lunch we found ready for us. I was wondering what genie had escaped from the *Arabian Nights* to arrange things so aptly for our comfort, when it came to me, suddenly, how at our last meeting Mr. Frohman had discovered our tastes without my being aware at all of what he was after. As soon as I left him then he must have sent word to his New York staff to arrange things just so. A great man.

Some of the English newspapers had commented with surprise on the fact that we had agreed to play in America without any written contract with Mr. Frohman. The *St. James's Gazette* said, "For the moment it does take one's breath away to hear of such frankly unbusinesslike proceedings. They are like a breath from an earlier world—at any rate from a world in which a man's word is his bond." But to anyone connected with the theatre there was nothing so very strange about it. I had enough sense to know that I should be far safer to leave all arrangements in Mr.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Frohman's hands than to attempt any "businesslike" arrangement of my own devising. His word was known to be his bond, and no actor that ever worked for him ever refused an offer to return to his management again. I had the same experience with Charles Hawtrey when I engaged to play Golligher for him in *General John Regan*. It was just, "Will you play this part for so much a week?" and, "I will, up to eight performances a week," and we shook hands on it. When I come to think of it, I have not had written contracts for more than perhaps 15 per cent. of all my London engagements. Perhaps travelling the road makes one sceptical about the all-compelling power of documents; perhaps, also, it helps one to know an honest man.

After lunch Frohman's man took me to the theatre to see what they had for us in the way of scenery, costumes and properties. A scene had been set which was the stage manager's best notion of an Irish cottage interior. It was the usual sort of cottage interior in use at that time, about 34 feet wide, 30 feet deep and 18 high. This had to be altered. And as fast as I indicated the alterations, the flats were lowered on to the stage, whereupon the stage carpenter and his crew set to work on them, and the scenic artist got ready to paint them. When I came again to the theatre on Monday morning, all was right and ready. I was then taken by the property master to the stores, a five-storey building that housed the costumes and properties. A counter ran down the middle of each floor. On one of the counters

AFTER

the staff had laid out all the costumes and so forth that they judged from their instructions might be of use to me. As I chose an item it was put straight into a basket, and the lot came with us to the theatre. To a mere Irishman these demonstrations of competent organisation were a peculiar delight.

On February 18th we made our American début with *A Pot of Broth*. The type of play and our peculiar technique of acting were so novel to the New York critics that they obviously did not know what to say and took refuge in guarded admiration. A good example of their bewilderment was provided by the gentleman who confessed that "with regard to Mr. Fay's acting I don't know whether it was pure genius or pure ignorance." I treasure that oracle. It was the finest compliment I have ever had. Whether they understood me or not, the Americans were never anything but kind to us. It would take far too long, even if I could remember them, to recite details, but there was one very early instance of thoughtfulness that my wife and I can never forget. While we were dressing for our first night, a great box of flowers arrived for "herself." We wondered who in the length and breadth of America could be doing such a thing. It turned out that they were sent as "greetings" to the young Irish actress by the Ellen Terry of America, Miss Maude Adams. To add to our cheerfulness, just as the curtain was going up a cablegram was thrust into my hand. It was from Barrie, wishing us all good luck.

A few days later in Broadway I met my old friend

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

Dudley Digges, just back from tour and looking for work. I was glad to be able to give him some. When we had finished with *A Pot of Broth* he came to play with us in *The Rising of the Moon*, making the third member of the original Ormond Dramatic Society in the cast. I may say that *The Rising of the Moon* did not get over nearly so well as its predecessor. The audiences did not seem to appreciate its political background, which surprised us, in view of the notorious influence of Irish Nationalism on American public life, especially in New York. The ballad singer, again, meant nothing to the inhabitants of a city where nobody in his senses would ever think of singing in the streets for a living.

Our run at the Savoy did not last so long as we had hoped. Before many nights had passed I could see Frohman's motive in sending us to New York. The piece we played in front of was an adaptation from the French by Paul B. Potter, who had had to adapt all the French vitality out of it to make it possible for an Anglo-Saxon public and the New York censor. On a report that it was showing signs of collapse, Frohman had thought to bolster it up by adding a novelty such as we could provide. But that proved to be beyond our modest powers. *Twenty Days in the Shade* had to be withdrawn (with the actress whose name has since become familiar to half the world as a film star—Miss Pauline Frederick), to be succeeded by something very different—Rann Kennedy's *The Servant in the House*, a play that afterwards had some success on this side until it was eclipsed by Jerome K. Jerome's

AFTER

exercise on the same formula, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.

In the ordinary course we should have returned to England forthwith. But Frohman had not yet given up hope of *Twenty Days*. Chicago might swallow what New York had only nibbled at. His representative, Mr. Hayman, therefore, gave us the option to continue in the show, provided we could give another play—something more substantial and of more general appeal than either of those we had shown. So I got Boyle to let us do *The Building Fund*. There was policy in this, for Boyle had a brother in Chicago who was a big noise there, being no less than Chief of Police and a very rich man to boot. He had made his pile in the building trade after the great fire that wiped out the best part of the city in 1871. But he was now out of that and making more money, hand over fist, as an ice-merchant.

The interval between the two engagements afforded us a little holiday for sight-seeing, which included a tour of Chinatown (a real one under the tutelage of an experienced policeman) and a visit to Coney Island to "hear the silence." It also enabled us to discover, from an advertisement on Brooklyn Bridge, that Lipton's tea was obtainable in New York, which was the most substantial joy of all. It was well-nigh dying we had been for a decent cup of tea ever since we landed.

Our location in Chicago was Power's Theatre, where we had the peculiar, almost tragic, experience of being only too successful. For *The Building Fund*

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

we were able to put up a real original Dublin cast—namely, Dudley Digges and his wife, Maire Quinn, Frank and myself and my wife, Brigit O'Dempsey. Being all, so to speak, a family party and knowing the play backwards and forwards, we gave a show that made the main piece look even sillier than it was. So far from putting new life into *Twenty Days in the Shade*, we killed it and thereby killed our own run.

It was some consolation that we got great space in the Chicago newspapers, which in those days—I can't speak for now, when movies may have changed all that—made a big feature of theatrical news. We were beset by pressmen pestering us for information about the Irish theatre and its relation to the dramatic renaissance initiated by Ibsen. The renaissance had not yet reached the American stage, but it was a live topic among the intelligent people. The young pressmen were wholly up to date in their reading, and much coffee was consumed at many pleasant gatherings while we debated the modern theatre *versus* the old. This interest eventually spread all over America to such an extent that, by the time Father Dawson Byrne published his book, *The Story of the Irish National Theatre*, in 1929, there were 21 Little Theatres in Chicago, 53 in New York and 480 throughout America, all following the lead of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. If it was late in starting, the United States has made up for it since by establishing schools of drama in connexion with all the principal universities, notably Yale and Harvard, and by encouraging lectures on drama by the Red Path

AFTER

Society and the Drama League in all the small towns, with Little Theatres wherever they could find audiences to support them.

Chief of Police Boyle did us proud, as a man should whose thirty years in Chicago had not mitigated his Dundalk brogue. He entertained us in the brown-stone mansion he had built on the spot where he had camped out after the great fire, and he showed us how ice was got and stored. Altogether I have the pleasantest memories of Chicago. Not that the place itself was much to look at. The front on Lake Michigan is noble; but, for the rest, the Chicago I saw was much like Manchester in a bad mood—fog, sulphurous fumes and all. But it has been rebuilt several times since then. I am assured that it is a really swell city now.

CHAPTER II

SOON after our return to England the Stage Society produced Arnold Bennett's *What the Public Wants*, in which I took the part of Holt St. John. Those who have seen the play will remember that St. John is an ultra-modern producer. I never enjoyed a part more. It is rare fun to get the chance of burlesquing oneself, and I took full advantage of it. Bennett had just finished working for one of the daily newspapers, and as he did not hold with their slick business methods, or their treatment of him, he wrote this play to give expression to his feelings. It is, in my opinion, one of his best plays, and if he had used any other theme but an attack on the "Third Estate" it would in all probability have had a long run. It still plays as well as it did then, and is a most useful addition to the list of any repertory theatre. When, some months later, the play was put on for a run, Charles Hawtrey gave a great performance in it as Holt St. John. How good he was I can best express by saying that I enjoyed seeing his performance even better than giving my own.

We had not been "resting" long before William Poel wrote to Frank asking him if he and I and Brigit would like to play in his forthcoming production of *Macbeth* at the Fulham Theatre. We had seen other productions of his, particularly his *Merchant of Venice*, in which he played Shylock as it was done in Shakespeare's own day—as a red-headed Jew. It changed the values of the characters to an extraordinary degree,

AFTER

and I then saw for the first time *The Merchant of Venice*, a Comedy by William Shakespeare, and not, what is usually presented to modern audiences, the Tragedy of Shylock the Jew. Also we had seen his production of *Romeo and Juliet* played by a boy and girl and not by a man of forty-five and a woman of forty, as is usually done. We were very glad to get an opportunity to be under his direction, and so it came about that three Fays appeared on the stage as the three witches. Our Lady Macbeth was Lillah McCarthy, and Hubert Carter was the Macbeth. Our messenger and stage manager has since become known as the proprietor of the Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich, where he has carried on the good work with well-deserved success.

There were two things about production I learned from Mr. Poel. One was to make a point of occasional rehearsals for words only without any movement, which enables the actors to concentrate on their speeches alone; the other, that if one wants pace in a scene one must look after the big words and the little ones will look after themselves. There is a lot in this—to stress the words that convey the sense.

Poel's *Macbeth* was one of my life's landmarks, for it was the last show in which Frank and I were ever to play together. For a good many years he toured England with various companies, and he had a spell at Birmingham with Barry Jackson, but unfortunately it was before my time there. From 1918 he lived mainly in Dublin, teaching elocution and producing

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

for amateur societies. It was in Dublin that, to my great sorrow, he died on January 2, 1931.

There is an old saying in the theatre, that "it is easier to get work when you have it than when you are idle," and this engagement with Mr. Poel brought a Shakespearean job for Frank, while my wife and I started rehearsals under Granville Barker's direction for a tour of *John Bull's Other Island*, in which Poel was to play the lead as Father Keegan. I shall have something to say presently about Poel's rendering of that extraordinarily difficult part. I imagine that most of those who saw that production and are still above the earth do not forget Nigel Playfair's Broadbent. It was a perfect bit of casting. His representation of a clever but fatuous man to type, full of sentiment and good-nature and as utterly incapable of anything not English, was the finest and most exemplary piece of character acting I have ever seen. It was the joy of a lifetime, and the best of it was that off the stage Playfair was a sincere and active Gladstonian Liberal. I am sure he spoke every word that Shaw put into his mouth with complete conviction. My wife had the genteel but not very exciting part of Nora, while I bumbled along about "me sufferin's" as old Haffigan. But now as to Poel. During the first few weeks of the tour I watched him re-create his part—a thing I have never seen an actor do before or since. His first performances did not please him, so bit by bit for the next two weeks he altered it, word by word, line by line, until, when he had finished, it was a completely new reading of Keegan, with the original

AFTER

business and movements unaltered, and so nobody upset.

The play had as good a reception on this tour as when it had previously been on the road, especially in Dublin, where Brigit and I had not been since leaving the Abbey, and where now we were welcomed back with all the demonstrative affection that an Irish audience can give to old favourites. Yet, for all the nice things that the critics, both English and Irish, said about its wit and acuteness of observation, the fact remains that *John Bull's Other Island* ranks among Shaw's failures. It is interesting as the first play of his later manner, where action is nothing and talk everything, but its talk was out of date before it was written down. Mr. Shaw left Ireland in 1876, and it was only by hearsay that he knew of the Land League, the Plan of Campaign, and what Parnell meant to Ireland. By the time he had grasped the significance of all these things, Ireland had put them away and was busy organising the Gaelic League which produced Sinn Féin, followed by two revolutions and the formation of the Free State. There is half a century between the Ireland of *John Bull's Other Island* and the Ireland of Sean O'Casey, and yet to O'Casey's name one might add, with profound reverence, the name of J. M. Synge.

This tour finished in December, and I was on my way to spend the Christmas time at Dunmow when I saw at the end of a column of the *Westminster Gazette* a paragraph stating that Sir Herbert Tree proposed producing a new play by Justin Huntley McCarthy,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

called *The O'Flynn*. I wrote at once to Frederick Whelan, Sir Herbert's secretary, whom I knew, and went on my way, only to find a letter waiting for me from Whelan that had crossed mine asking me to come and see Sir Herbert after the Christmas festivities were finished. That was a merry Christmas, and the result of my interview was my first real London engagement. I was to play Conaher O'Rourke, body servant to the O'Flynn.

The play was a romantic comedy by a dramatist who had nothing to learn about play construction, and following the custom of the time it was written to give opportunity for a great display by the "star" actor. The scenes and costumes were designed by Percy McQuoid, an expert on the eighteenth century, and Miss Evelyn D'Alroy and Henry Ainley were at the head of the cast, which included a vast number of small part people and "walkers on," for those crowd scenes which were as the breath of life to our chief. One of the male extras, I remember, made himself conspicuous by coming to rehearsal in a different suit of clothes every other day, the tone value of each suit being decided by the colour of the nicely disposed silk handkerchief he wore in the breast pocket. His position in the scene in which he appeared was just prominent enough to attract attention. On the day he arrived in his seventh suit Tree seemed to look at him once or twice with evident interest, and presently walked up to him. Taking the silk handkerchief from the young man's breast pocket he tried it in three or four different places all round the stage, after

AFTER

which he replaced it precisely where and as it had been, saying with a sigh as he turned away, "No! No! Perhaps you are right."

The O'Flynn ran in London for nearly six months. When we were given notice of the termination of the run and I was preparing to pack up my goods and chattels, Mr. Whelan suggested that I ought to be in the Shakespearean season that was to follow. Considering my brogue I thought Whelan was having his little joke, but he was serious. "Better see the Chief about it," he said. I saw the Chief and was given an engagement on the spot, not only for the Shakespeare season but for the tour of *The O'Flynn* as well. I raised the question of my brogue. He waved it airily aside. "Of course, I'm afraid you will have to say 'wat' instead of 'what' and 'wich' instead of 'which,' not to mention 'bawth' for 'bath.' It's all wrong, I know, but you will have to do it. Good morning!" And that is how, of all people on this earth, William Fay was found playing Justice Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Tree and Ellen Terry and Lady Tree. I was among the quality now and no mistake.

Tree was a supreme character actor, and his Falstaff was a magnificent example of his art, so rich in colour and (what one so seldom gets on the stage to-day) unction. But need I say that my proudest recollection of that engagement at His Majesty's is of having played with Ellen Terry. She was by that time quite an old woman, and her memory for her lines was not what it had been. But still what a player! And

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

what a person! The theatre was a different place from the moment she entered it. Even before you saw her, from the stage-door attendant upwards, everybody was all of a do-da, and the feeling surged, like the waves from a distant liner on the shore, into every corner of the building. The actors, I believe, felt it even more than the audience, for to play along with her was better than a sea voyage for putting life into you. She lived in the part she was playing, and her virtue was infectious, for nobody who was lucky enough to be performing with her could help but do the same. As to the peculiar quality of her *rappor*t with her audiences I can say nothing that has not been said hundreds of times already. Sarah Bernhardt could stun an audience into awestruck surrender to her genius. Ellen Terry's ascendancy was different. She was so evidently in love with her audience and with all the human world that they could not help loving her in return. Every man, woman and child there fell in love with her and with happiness. It was a unique gift. No actress, I am convinced, ever had it before in the same degree. I question if any ever will again.

For his tour Tree had a mixed programme that included with *The O'Flynn*, *The Merchant* and *Trilby*. In my humble opinion Svengali was Tree's masterpiece, and I believe it was his own favourite among the great range of his character parts. The tour opened at Cardiff. We had no sooner got to our second "stand," Birmingham, when the death of King Edward closed all the theatres in the country.

AFTER

It was worse than a fair day. I took the opportunity of slipping over to Dublin to see my mother, who was very ill, and to await there the arrival of the company when the theatres should be reopened after the King's funeral. In due course we reassembled at the Theatre Royal, Dublin. I found Tree somewhat troubled. He was afraid that the Dublin people would scoff at his Irish brogue, and honesty obliges me to confess that it was about as bad and as funny as could be. However, I assured him with a good conscience that the Dubliners would not mind what sort of a brogue he had so long as they liked the play. The theatre was packed on the first night and he got a tremendous reception. After he had taken eight curtain calls at the end, he sent for me and, in response to the audience's demand for a speech, he took me on the stage with him and told them that "his splendid brogue was entirely due to my able tuition." This was just the kind of joke they expected from him. It was received with roars of laughter and applause and filled the theatre for him for the rest of the week.

It was while I was with him that I began a series of experiments to see how far an actor in creating a part could add to it qualities that were not mentioned in the lines or suggested by the "business," like Churdles Ash's rheumatism in *The Farmer's Wife*, but existed solely in the artist's imagination. Was it possible for members of the audience to recognise them? In my part in *The O'Flynn* I impressed on myself that I had a great feeling of loyalty for my master, but took care neither to say it nor to show it

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in any specific way, and in *Punch* the critic stressed just this quality as part of my impersonation. Since then I have tried the same trick many times and always found that what the actor visualises as the character he is playing in his own mind is what the audience accepts as the original conception of the part. The stronger his mental image the more detail his audience will perceive in the representation, as Miss Ruth Draper can people her stage with characters that are only in her mind's eye so effectively that one can hardly believe they are not in reality there.

The Coronation of King George was celebrated in the world of the theatre by a Grand Command Gala Performance held at His Majesty's Theatre on Tuesday, June 27th, 1911. The programme was a varied one, opening with a special Prologue written for the occasion by Owen Seaman and spoken by Johnston Forbes-Robertson, followed by the Letter Scene from *The Merry Wives*, with Mrs. Kendal and Ellen Terry as the Wives; *David Garrick*, with Mary Moore and Charles Wyndham; and, as the *pièce de résistance*, the Forum Scene from *Julius Cæsar*, with Tree as Antony, E. S. Willard, A. E. George and Basil Gill in other parts, and two hundred well-known actors to make up the crowd. There was also *The Critic*, with Gerald Du Maurier, Charles Hawtreay and Arthur Bouchier; and Ben Jonson's *Vision of Delight*, preceded by a special prologue written by Herbert Trench and spoken by Mrs. Pat Campbell, completed the bill. I think every available actor and actress in London was in that show in some capacity, however humble.

AFTER

All those who had nothing better to do crowded on to swell the mob of Roman citizens. That was a mob, and a good mob too, and Tree was in his element playing with it. How Cecil King, the stage director, managed to find dressing accommodation for everybody he alone knows. I know that, when it came to housing these Roman citizens there was no room from the grid to the cellars, so that we were put to it to dress in the long Arcade behind the theatre which the shopkeepers loyally lent for the occasion. Down the centre from one end to the other was a row of wooden washstands, each with a basin and jug of water, and beside each washstand a wooden dressing-table at which to make up. At the far end of the Arcade an enterprising hotel opened one of its windows so that thirsty actors—and who was not?—could get the wherewithal to quench their thirst during the long evening. And there was no ten-o'clock closing in those days.

Granville Barker produced the Crowd Scene. We were provided with a printed slip giving the various cues and the numbers of the various actors that responded to them. Such as 2-4-6-8-23-34—say AH AH AH, or 12-14-29-38—say HAH HAH HAH. And as each was given a number, with a little practice we got the trick of it. After a few days E. S. Willard took us in hand. It was the first time that either he or Granville Barker had had a stage crowd of two hundred actors to shout for them, and when we all gave tongue together the noise fairly shook the scenery and brought clouds of dust out of the grid.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

I was cast for an old Roman tramp, with long beard and stick, a regular old Father Christmas. On the evening of the performance when I arrived at the Arcade most of my colleagues were already busy covering themselves with bole and formidable whiskers secured with plenty of spirit-gum. It suddenly dawned on me that the removal of bole and spirit-gum later in the evening with cold water, in order to get into evening clothes to take part in singing "God save the King" on the stage at the end of the performance, was likely to cause me a lot of trouble, not to mention the two hundred of us trying to dress at the same time. Accordingly, I took off only my coat, collar and tie and hid them in a safe place, and then put on my gaberdine over the rest of my clothes and didn't worry about bole or whiskers. For, thought I, in that mob who was going to see enough of a person of my size to determine what way I was dressed or not dressed? The result was gratifying in the extreme. I was out of the Arcade fully dressed before most of the others had finished transferring the bole off their faces on to the fronts of their dress shirts or making up their minds that they would need a lot of hot water when they got home to deal effectively with their whiskers. As the Irish proverb goes, "There is nothing like an old dog for a hard road."

It was a tremendous occasion. The whole of the pit seating had been removed, and a huge Royal Box erected instead, the which was filled by more Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses than ever before

AFTER

attended a theatrical performance in any theatre in Europe. When, at the end of the evening, the stage was crowded with all the performers, and the entire audience stood while everybody sang "God save the King," there was a thrill in that theatre that one can experience only once in a lifetime. When I recall those days I cannot help feeling like my famous fellow countryman, Mr. Barney Maguire of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, and murmuring—

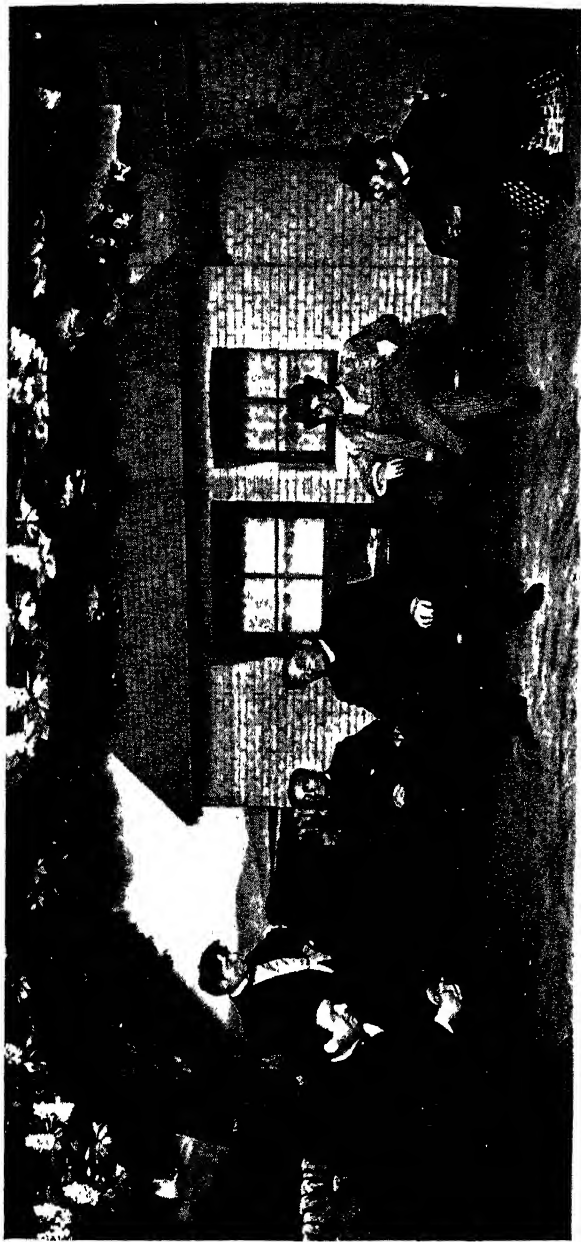
Och, the Coronation !
What celebration
For emulation
Could with it compare ?

For, mark you, the Gala Performance at His Majesty's was not the finish of it for the poor players. At the end of the week I had to appear at number 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister (Mr. Asquith) had had the happy idea of inviting the King and Queen and the Lords and the Commons to a theatrical evening in the ball-room of his official residence, when Granville Barker's company did *The Twelve Pound Look* and Act III of *John Bull's Other Island*, in which I had the comfortable and congenial rôle of old Haffigan. The latter item was a bit of malicious humour on Mr. Asquith's part, seeing how largely the possibility of a real Irish settlement was being canvassed at the time. As all the world knows, the Shavian lash is plied with its usual impartiality. Nobody—King, Lords, Commons, Liberal, Tory, Irish as well as English—escapes whipping. But it all went over grandly, for everybody gets something

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

to laugh at when somebody else gets a whack. My part involved sitting on an upturned clothes basket for about twenty-five minutes, so I had plenty of time to see what effect the performance was having. I hope I am not guilty of *lèse majesté* in saying that none laughed more heartily at the rating they got than the King and Queen. Afterwards Mr. Asquith sent every member of both casts a set of fine photographs of the plays together with an invitation to a Foreign Office levee. I still have the blue card containing direction for the disposal of my carriage when it should reach Charles Street on the eventful night. I regret to say that it never did. When the beautiful gilt-edged card arrived I was in a dirty old shirt washing the floors of our flat, "herself" being away on tour.

When an old actor sits down to write his life, as, in a manner of speaking, I am doing now, he must pull himself up at times to marvel, perhaps with a certain resentment, over the all-absorbing power of the theatre. Surely, too, his readers, as they turn over page after page relating to this production, that engagement, and this other impersonation, reception, criticism, analysis of play or of performance, must sigh and ask, "Is this indeed a man's life we are reading or is it the account of some puppet which, when not displaying itself in 'the show,' is stowed away out of existence in its box?" I think there is something here that has to be faced. Of all human callings that of the actor is the one that makes most demands upon a man's essential vitality; of all



LOUIS
CALVERT.

H. GRANVILLE
BARKER.

F. CREMLIN.

J. D. BEVERIDGE.

WILFRED SHINE.

W. G. FAY.

SCENE FROM ACT III "JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND,"
BY BERNARD SHAW (*Coronation performance at 10 Downing St.*)

AFTER

human-built temples the theatre makes the completest claim on his body, soul and spirit. His vows are none the less binding for having never been uttered, his habit none the less impossible to discard for being a fool's cap and bells, his dedication none the less complete for being involuntary. And upon the top of all this he has to face the continual exigencies of his profession, which keep him superficially in a state of worry. If one could imagine a religious order in which the rules would be as arbitrary as the regimen was non-existent, one might get something near to the imposition of the theatre upon those who have fallen beneath its spell. "All other Life abandon, ye who enter here," might well be written in neon signs above every stage door. Incidentally, I think this is one of the reasons why most actors who have any religion at all find their needs best satisfied by the Roman Catholic Church. But that by the way. The inescapable truth about theatre people is that for them nothing outside the theatre has more than a secondary, even a shadowy existence. This is not less the case when, as it has been with me, and, I believe, with far more theatre folk than the outside world imagines—an actor is happily married to an actress and has a satisfying family life. Then, while there is work going, his energy and imagination are centred in that work; and while he is "resting," he lives half in reminiscence of past engagements, half in anticipation of engagements to come. It is as different from the other arts as from a business life. For his very body is an instrument of the theatre,

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

and his mind, trained as it is to direct that instrument strictly in concert with others, can do so in full power and effectiveness in the theatre alone. Sensitive observers, who are used to meeting and conversing only with "private" people, are sometimes taken aback, upon talking with theatre folk, to find them absent, even hollow, after a fashion that is as easy to feel as it is hard to define. They belong, not to the "real" world, but to another country, and their own foreignness or "unreality" is proclaimed in their voices, their movements, and often in their pathetic ignorance or indifference to what may be happening in the so-called "real" world. True, some of them—especially in England, where there is a curious habit of expecting actors to mix and mingle on equal terms with society and political people—manage to disguise it fairly well. Some, though by no means all, actors are capable of doing a bit of play-acting off the stage, and if Miss Henrietta Watson, as she once confessed, never felt capable of entering or leaving a real drawing-room at a real party with any credit to herself or her hosts, I do not think that Miss Marie Tempest or Miss Gladys Cooper would have any insuperable difficulty on that score. But the surface has only to be scratched for you to find that, for all of us, the kind of "realities" presented by Mr. Asquith or the Royal Family are the true wraiths, and the questions as to how far up-stage we are to stand or which word of a sentence we are most to emphasise, are the hard, the exciting facts of existence. And so long as we are in a position to deal with such

AFTER

facts—in a word, so long as we are “working”—we are wonderfully philosophical about what happens to us, or to the rest of the world. Of course, when we are unable to get work on account of an unthriving theatre, we feel that there must be something very far wrong with the world.

This little divagation, you may guess, gentle lay reader, is to excuse and explain what follows, more or less, to the end of this book, and what will need neither excuse nor explanation to the most ferocious of theatrical readers—namely, a succession of theatrical activities in which I had an interest, with my comments and recollections concerning plays and their people. Fortunately, with all its drawbacks, the theatre is a many-sided affair.

It is funny to remember, after all the grandeurs of the Coronation, that my next job should be to form part of a music-hall programme for Sir Alfred Butt by producing and acting in a short Irish play by John Redmond's daughter, called *Falsely True*. I had the help of Sara Allgood and Fred O'Donovan, and we had a successful two weeks with it, though a modern Irish play struck strangely upon an audience who were then accustomed chiefly to red-nosed comedians and mothers-in-law, and thought that all the Irish lived in quaint thatched hovels with the pig running in and out and the hens roosting over the bed.

After that, as things were slack, I joined the Play-actors Society and so got an opportunity to produce the first two of Björnson's plays to be done

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

in England—*The Gauntlet* and *The Newly Married Couple*. They are both feminist plays and far more challenging than *A Doll's House*. When *The Gauntlet* was first produced at Hamburg in 1883 it gave rise to a bitter controversy on the ethics of sex. It was said that hundreds of contemplated marriages were broken off in Norway as the result of it. But somehow it failed to appeal to the British public as *A Doll's House* did. The Play-actors Society had been formed to give provincial actors and actresses, or those who spent most of the year in touring companies, an opportunity of being seen in performances in London West End theatres. It also tried to help young dramatists by giving their plays a London production. Two of the society's notable discoveries were Elizabeth Baker, whose *Chains* became one of the topics of the year, and Harold Chapin, a born dramatist if there ever was one, whose death on the field of battle was the cruellest of the many blows that the War inflicted on the stage. It was the Play-actors who gave Ibsen's great tragedy, *Brand*, its first and only production in England. I had the honour of being entrusted with it. We used the excellent prose version by William Wilson. When *Brand* is played in Norway, it is played in full, which takes five hours. It was out of the question for our society to try to present a play of that duration, but we wrote to Mr. Wilson and, with his permission, H. K. Aylliffe and I spent three months cutting it down to two and a half hours' playing. It proved a great success with H. A. Saintsbury as Brand and

AFTER

Phyllis Relph as Agnes. About the same time I was also doing a good deal of work for the Stage Society. I directed the production of Congreve's *The Way of the World*, D'Annunzio's *The Dead City*, and James Joyce's only dramatic essay, *Exiles*; and in May 1912 I played Crispin in a version of Jacinto Benevente's famous comedy, *Los Intereses Creados*. This is commonly known in English as *Invested Interests*, but Beryl De Zoete, whose version we played, called it *The Bias of the World*, which is a much more suitable title for the theme. Crispin was the best and the longest part I have ever had in London. The love scene between Columbine and the Poet, played by Nell Carter and Mary Barton, I have never seen equalled in any play for delicacy and charm. I often wonder that Benevente's play is not used more often in repertory theatres, as the cast is not large and the scenery gives an opportunity for the designer to express himself.

When Charles Hawtrey accepted "George Birmingham's" *General John Regan* I was given a part after my own heart—Thaddeus Golligher, proprietor of the famous journal *The Connaught Eagle*. (That was in 1913, and after twenty years I have just finished playing it again at Elstree for Henry Edwards.)

"George Birmingham's" Dr. O'Grady, as everybody knows, is own brother to Ananias, and Charles Hawtrey was the light comedian that could play "liar parts" better than anyone in the English-speaking theatre or any other. Dr. O'Grady fitted him better than any glove. The moment he came

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

on the stage it didn't matter half a hoot to any member of the audience whether he was from Galway or Aberdeen. I always seem to be saying that I learned a lot (learning is the actor's business), but it's the truth that I learned more from Hawtrey about acting and production than from anyone else I ever worked with. When he gave you an inflexion or a bit of business to do, you recognised without fail that it was just right and got precisely the effect he wanted. His theatre sense was more subtle than that of any other producer under whose direction I have played. I remember rehearsing a scene with him, and when we had finished he said, "I'm sorry, but we must do that again." When we had completed it a second time, he said, "I knew it was wrong, I felt it was wrong." He went down to the stage manager's table, and taking the manuscript from him looked at it for a moment and then tore out four pages and threw them away, saying, "That's what it wanted. Now let's stitch it together again." Without the missing pages the scene was right.

One Monday night I failed to get the usual number of laughs in a scene with Leonard Boyne, who played Doyle. I altered my reading of it the next night with no better result. I tried other changes on Wednesday and on Thursday—still no laughs. As I came off the stage that night and was making my way to my dressing-room the Chief called me into his, and said, "For Heaven's sake, Golligher, leave that scene of yours alone and don't be chopping and changing it every night." I said, "I can't get the laughs there



MAIRE O'NEILL AS AUNT ELLEN IN "WHITE-
HEADED BOY "

AFTER

that I used to.” “Well, you fool, it’s not your fault but the audience’s,” said Hawtrey. “Put the scene back where it was and next week a fresh audience will give you the laughs again. It often happens in a long run that for a week or so a joke won’t go each night, but the following week it gets over every time. Whatever you do don’t pull a scene to pieces that you have found to play successfully the first four weeks of a run.” I thanked him for his advice and was startled to realise that, though he was not on the stage during my scene, he heard me altering it and went to the trouble of giving me the clue to what was wrong. For he was right as usual. I often went into the Prompt Corner to watch his work, and one night, I remember, he seemed dead tired, walking about the stage with his eyes half closed, the audience laughing at everything he said. When he came off he saw me sitting in the corner and came to me and said, “Do you see that fat old buffer sitting at the end of the third row in the stalls? It’s taken me six minutes’ hard work to make him laugh.”

When the London run had finished, my wife and I were engaged by George Tyler to go to New York to play in the production of *General John*, which he proposed doing in the autumn. It was to be directed by Felix Edwards, and Maire O’Neill took over Mary Ellen, which Cathleen Nesbitt had played at the Apollo. We tried it out at Atlantic City before bringing it to the Hudson Theatre in New York, and it was pleasant to step from a chilly English autumn into the radiance

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

of the American "fall" with a temperature of over 70 degrees, so that I could sit outside without a coat and do some of the pastel sketches which are my hobby. When we opened on Broadway the play had an excellent reception both from the public and the Press. Indeed the same critic that on my previous visit had been unable to decide if my acting was pure genius or pure ignorance was so handsome as to decide that anyway it wasn't the latter. In the spring of 1914 we had to vacate the Hudson Theatre and go to the Liberty instead. This did not help us, neither did the fact that our Dr. O'Grady was not a light comedian like Hawtrey, but a "straight actor" used to playing leading parts in Shaw's plays and to heavy dramatic stuff. He had none of that inborn faculty of Hawtrey's for telling lies with all the charm of truth.

When *General John* finished I refused a part in a play called *Cheating Cheaters*, as we wanted to get back home. Soon after we arrived, Philip Carr engaged us to play for him in Paris at the Vieux Colombier Theatre, where he was running a series of English and Irish plays. This was before the unique productions of Jacques Coupeau had made the name of the Vieux Colombier famous. Coupeau it was who first among European producers invented a set of scenic units with which, by various changes of position and lighting, he could stage any play he wished. His, too, was one of the first successful experiments in adapting a tiny stage to give all the variety of scenes that are required by a theatre playing repertory.

AFTER

Although we had only the week-end in Paris and it was our first visit, we saw much of the city that strangers never see at all, for Philip Carr took us round, and what he doesn't know about Paris I don't know about Dublin. We had intelligent and interested audiences for our plays.

It was in the February of that winter, 1915, that our only child, a son, was born in London. Desmond William Fay has shown no particular interest in the theatre or in other arts; his world's work is that of a draughtsman in a firm of structural engineers. But "his heart hangs all upon"—a cinder track. In his spare time he is a keen speedway rider, a sport which is in its infancy in this country, even as the sport of the Little Theatre was an unborn child in my youth. Therefore he hopes, eventually, to be, like myself, an entertainer of the public before he is done. He has had one broken head already.

CHAPTER III

DURING the first few weeks of the Great War the theatre was badly hit. The autumn productions proceeded as usual, but the public were too bewildered and busy to take much interest in them. As time passed, however, and the early hopes that the magnitude of the conflict would quickly bring the nations to their senses were shown to be delusive, the houses began to fill up again. God knows that in those sad times people needed all the diversion they could get, and as part of the policy of keeping up the national *moral* the Government gave encouragement to all kinds of entertainment. More, indeed, was demanded from the stage than it could conveniently give, for no section of the community responded more promptly and generously to the call to arms, and even before the end of 1914 managers were finding difficulty in filling their casts. In one respect the national emergency permanently benefited our profession. When the problem of man power became so complicated that it was hopeless to deal with it wholly by sifting individual claims for exemption, the Government adopted the expedient of dealing with the organised trades *en bloc* through the unions. For this purpose the Actors' Association ranked as a trade union, and thus gained not only prestige for itself but the first recognition of the stage as an essential part of the national life.

For a good many years I had been an active member of the Actors' Association, and now, owing to the depletion of our Council by the demands of the

AFTER

fighting services, was forced, much against my will, to accept the chairmanship, and with the aid of Adam Sprange, our secretary, and John Mortimer, I set about the urgent task of freeing the Association from its debt. Thanks to Sir Herbert Tree, Sir George Alexander, H. B. Irving and many others who spoke for us at the public meetings we organised for the purpose, we not only got out of debt but, by 1916, had a substantial credit balance at the bank. There was one bit of business we had to do that involved sending a deputation to Downing Street. When the Entertainments Tax was first proposed, complimentary tickets for theatrical performances were not exempted. Now this was a serious matter for the profession, for the actor's bread and butter depend largely on seeing what is going on. That is why he can always get a complimentary ticket for the asking. Hence a tax on complimentary tickets was in effect a tax on seeking employment. We sent Ellen Terry, Sidney Valentine and H. B. Irving to interview Mr. Bonar Law. They came back triumphant. They had wisely let Ellen do all the talking, and what man could ever resist her? Mr. Bonar Law agreed to everything. Not that it cost him much, to be sure!

When Mr. Boucicault revived Pinero's *Trelawney of the Wells* with Miss Irene Vanbrugh as Rose Trelawney, he engaged me to play the Stage Manager, O'Dwyer, a nice little part in the last act. The revival was so successful that they had to put on extra matinées until the middle of October, during the time of the full moon, when the Germans made an air attack every

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

night about 9 p.m., and the theatres were deserted. I was living in Chelsea at the time, and as I had not to be on the stage until after 10 p.m. I was usually on my way to the theatre when the doings began; and what with the enemy's bombs and our own shrapnel (which was worse) the journey along the King's Road was not devoid of interest. At Sloane Square Station it was often twenty minutes before the train ventured to pass the open spaces between there and Charing Cross. Finally, there was the sprint up Villiers Street and St. Martin's Lane to reach the stage door of the New Theatre and relieve the anxiety of Mr. Owen about the last member of his cast being in the theatre. I remember one night in the middle of a raid how, just as I reached the Chelsea Palace, a bus drew in to the pavement and I nipped into it. We reached Piccadilly Circus in four minutes, which must be a record for that distance for any motor-bus. The Underground stations I avoided, for they were so stuffy and crowded with refugees who had no further bourn that it was difficult for travellers who had. There they sat or lay, all along the platform, three or four deep, with children, dogs, cats, parrots and (highly necessary) chamber-pots, leaving only the narrowest passage for the passengers. Hundreds, especially in the East End, lived there during these nights and believed that they were safe, though in point of fact they were, in the mass, in much greater danger than if they had stayed at home. If, as might easily have happened, a German bomb had landed on an Underground lift-shaft, not a soul in the place

AFTER

would have survived. But fortunately it didn't happen. One night when the Irish Players were at the Chelsea Theatre there was a lot of movement and whispering all over the house. Two actors were on the stage and one said to the other, "What in the name of goodness is the matter with them? I'm thinkin' they don't like us at all to-night." To which the other replied, "Let you not be a fool. It's an air-raid, so it is, that's goin' on." "Thank God for that," says the other; "I thought they were givin' us the bird." The better known story is how George Robey stopped an incipient panic with his gag "Shurruup!" when a bomb fell near the Alhambra during the great run of *The Bing Boys* in 1917. But incidents like that were typical of the London stage at that time.

In the late spring of 1917 I had an offer from Mr. Piggott of the Liverpool Playhouse to take over the productions for the autumn season. His policy was to revive plays that were known to have been successful wherever they had been played, and to run them for as many weeks as the box-office returns were satisfactory—much the same kind of work as I had been doing at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, for Mr. Oswald, only at Liverpool there was to be a stock company, while at Manchester a new company was engaged for each play because we rehearsed them in London and took them up there for two weeks.

I was to begin work in Liverpool early in August, but by the end of July there was what Fleet Street (bad cess to it!) had begun to call a "comb-out" of all those in the last age category. My medical board

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

marked me a bad C 2, which exempted me from military service, but obliged me to engage in "work of national importance," the precise meaning of that impressive phrase being left to me to interpret. The best national service I could think of, if I wasn't allowed to amuse people, was to go back to Dunmow and help with the poultry farm. I knew a bit about hens and their ways, if not enough to be really dangerous. But while I was clearing up my work for the Actors' Day Fund previous to departing to the country, I had a visit from my friend Miss Friedman, the secretary of the Stage Society. When I told her what I was after doing, she said I was a fool. "You write to Captain Basil Dean at the headquarters of the Navy and Army Canteen Board at Knightsbridge," she said, "and he will find you some better work of national importance than chasing chickens." I took her advice, and Basil Dean took me on at once. He and Carl Leyel were controlling a large department that supplied plays and cinematograph pictures to all the camps in the country. If the camp was a large one, like Catterick or Bulford, it got plays, but if it was too small to carry the expense of a theatre it was provided with a small cinema. The camp theatres were occupied each week with a company doing two plays nightly and visiting each camp in succession before returning to London to rehearse two new ones and begin their itinerary again. There were camp theatres at Oswestry, Kimmel Park, Catterick, Ripon, Witley, Bramshot, Bulford, Tidworth, Larkhill, Blackdown and Bordon. The last one the Board built was at Clipstone. Catterick was

AFTER

the show theatre of the circuit. George Harris, who designed it, made it on the model of a London playhouse of Shakespeare's time. These camp theatres were a great boon to the soldiers. The prices of admission were low, and any profits made went to swell the sports fund of the particular camp. The Board arranged for the transport of the actors from camp to camp and for their board and lodging at the hostels attached to the theatres. It was a highly complicated business that was carried through without a hitch, thanks to the initiation and energy of Basil Dean and Carl Leyel's genius for organisation.

The first job they gave me was to produce and play in *The Butterfly on the Wheel* and *Raffles*, and to take the company to Clipstone. I took the company down, but I did not play. When *Raffles* was ready to go on I was recalled by wire to London to undertake another production there, and in London I stayed producing plays until I was demobilised.

We did what we could to please and amuse our audiences, but what is perhaps less obvious is the help we got from them all unconsciously on their part. You will hardly believe it, but many of those men had never seen a play acted before they joined up. Many a letter we afterwards had from France saying what an experience it had been and how they had enjoyed it. There never were such audiences. The boys came in to see our plays after a stiff day, and their response to the artist was entirely fresh and sincere. They were impatient of any kind of high-falutin' or sloppy sentiment, which they detected immediately. Hence

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

they were difficult to keep in hand with a play like *The Title*, though they loved a good comedy drama like *Freedom of the Seas*. Strong emotional scenes, if not played swiftly and with perfect simplicity, were sure to get the bird. Comedy of all kinds was safe, especially musical comedy, which always packed the theatre. Local references of any kind were sure to bring the house down, so I learned a bit about gagging. At Bulford, for example, where, unbeknownst to the powers that be, they trained a racehorse, remarks about training horses on the quiet were "safe," and jokes about "civvy boots" were good in those camps where the C.O. was notorious for giving large doses of C.B. to any men caught wearing them.

"Effects" were a tough problem. Whenever we played *The Land of Promise*, as sure as Taylor said to Nora, "Listen! Listen to the silence of the prairie," somewhere in the camp a bugle would blow or an aeroplane tune up for a night flight. Stage gunfire was always a dead flop, for the boys knew the real sounds only too well, so that our attempts to reproduce them were always greeted with hilarity, not to say ribaldry. The arrival of the sea-plane to bomb the ship in *The Freedom of the Seas* was the occasion of shrieks of mirth, but nobody took exception to the noise of the steamers' engines, which we got by rolling a heavy counter-weight back and forward. As we had no naval men among us, there were no experts on that kind of noise. Thanks be! It was fascinating to produce plays for an audience that was 90 per cent. male and most of that under thirty years of age.

AFTER

When the Armistice was signed in November 1918, the N.A.C.B. expected to be demobilised at the end of the year, but the War Office, knowing that the general demobilisation was going to be a long job, asked the Board to continue to supply plays to the camp theatres until all the camps were evacuated. In the course of time, however, we were all back in the comfortable hugger-mugger of civil life, and the whilom Captain Dean became Mr. Basil Dean of the Aldwych Theatre. His first adventure there was Arnold Bennett's *Sacred and Profane Love* with Iris Hoey, Franklyn Dyll and Clive Brook in the leading parts, and me as stage director. But he tried it out in Liverpool for a fortnight before putting it on in London. During the rehearsal Dean fell ill and I had to take charge. Arnold Bennett, as you might expect, was on the spot, and so I saw a good deal of him. He asked me to dine with him one evening at the Adelphi, where he was staying, and when we were seated in the dining-room, instead of ordering dishes from the menu, he sent for the head waiter and enjoyed himself giving directions for all sorts of foods of alien denominations to be brought us. The waiter departed equally pleased to have a visitor that knew more about food than "a cut from the joint and two veg, apple pie and cheese, and I'll take my coffee in the lounge." As we attacked these holy viands—the chef having, I am sure, left nothing undone to please a connoisseur—we talked "theatre." He told me that he seldom went there because it bored him, which was doubtless the reason why he was never a conspicuous success

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

as a dramatist. He had not the same interest in a play that he had in a piece of music. About music he knew a great deal. But to get his own plays technically correct he felt he needed to collaborate with someone, as he had done with Mr. Knoblock in *Milestones*. He told me, too, that he would never have written a novel if he had missed reading *A Mummer's Wife* by George Moore, which has scenes laid in the Potteries. This was a revelation to him of the material that was lying to his hand in his own home country. He asked how it was that I had never succeeded in making money, to which I replied, with my customary truthfulness, that I expected it was because I didn't know how. When the next complicated course was served and he found it to his liking he said, "Well, maybe you have got something out of life that I haven't." My response to this was, "One thing is certain. You have got something out of life that I never thought of looking for." How otherwise, thought I to myself, would he be staying at the Adelphi Hotel? There is a passage in his story *The Glimpse*, describing the sensations of a disembodied spirit, which had impressed me so much that I was sure it must have been derived from a personal experience. While we were having our coffee I asked him about it. He looked at me for a moment, and with that faint but unmistakable twinkle he could give his eyes he said, stuttering, "I . . . pinched . . . it . . . out of . . . one . . . of Annie Besant's books."

By 1920 there were only six camps still occupied. The N.A.C.B. had disbanded the staff of the amuse-

AFTER

ment department, but kept the theatres open by engaging various theatrical managers to bring companies to visit their theatres. I suppose A. K. Phillips and myself were the last to supply these with plays before the closing down of all camp theatres. I ran a stock company, including Hilda Plowright and Edward Petley, round the circuit for a year, and we did good business.

When Mrs. Edward Compton changed the old Grand Theatre at Nottingham into the Nottingham Repertory Theatre, she asked me to come down and produce a new play by Henry Walls called *Renovating Eve*. It was an entertaining comedy, though not so good as his later play, *Havoc*, which was produced at the London Haymarket. I had expected to stay in Nottingham about four weeks. Actually it was three years before I got back to London, for after *Renovating Eve* Mrs. Compton offered me the production of a Shakespeare season, and I was pleased with this chance to extend my experience in staging Shakespeare. As we had not a great deal of money to spend, costumes and scenery were made in the theatre. After thinking hard I decided to make a permanent setting for all the plays and add to it what extra scenery was unavoidable. We made the first six feet from the curtain line our main "acting area," and at each side placed two built arches with four-foot openings and depths. Across the stage six feet back we placed four pillars, eighteen feet high and two in diameter, standing on equidistant square bases. In front of those we hung three sets of curtains and whatever painted scenes were abso-

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

lutely necessary; behind them all scenes that required a full depth of stage. As these last would be seen only between the pillars it did not need many pieces to make a scene. The beauty of all such procedure, which the stage owes largely to Ellen Terry's son, Mr. Gordon Craig, is that it can combine the best art with the utmost economy. I tried to follow William Poel in having as few waits as possible. He never had more than one. I was obliged to divide my plays into three acts with two waits, but the tableau curtains never closed at the end of an act. At Christmas we produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a cast of eighty performers which included Miss Jean Anderton and thirty of her pupils for the ballet. In the last act I introduced a novelty by making Bottom and his colleagues use a wheeled platform, which they trundled in for their performance and then trundled out again, leaving a clear stage for the fairies. But probably the best of our shows was *Quality Street*, which we did in the Spring with Viola and Ellen Compton as Susan and Phœbe Throssel. It was the first and, I think, the only time the parts have been played by sisters, and the circumstance gave an atmosphere to the play that I have never felt in any other production. I can still hear Viola's triumphant voice as she writes the invitations for her sister's wedding—

Miss Susan Throssel presents her compliments to the Misses Willoughby and Miss Henrietta Turnbull and requests the honour of their presence at the nuptials of her sister Phœbe and Captain Valentine Brown.

—and Ellen Compton's Phœbe will never be excelled.

AFTER

During my second year at Nottingham we had a run of bad luck. First there was an outbreak of smallpox, which made timid people stay at home as much as possible. No sooner had we got over that than the miners went on strike. The shortage of coal was such that the Municipal Electricity Department could not supply the theatres with light, so we had to search for a temporary plant to give us what we needed.

We managed to buy a second-hand engine and dynamo from a neighbouring town. It arrived at the theatre on a Saturday morning, and that night we were opening our Shakespearean season with *Othello*. We bore it into the carpenter's shop beside the stage and bolted it down to thick baulks of timber. When we thought it secure we made a temporary connexion with the mains of the theatre and started up the engine. As soon as it gathered speed water began to pour out of the jacketing and make a small lake on the floor which was soon ankle-deep. We splashed round in it trying vainly to stop the leaks with red lead. To add to our troubles the engine presently began to wobble about on the timber bed, for the bolts were not strong enough to hold it down and at any moment it might take the dynamo with it and walk out into the yard. We kept experimenting until it was time to open the doors for the performance, but by that time it was obvious that nothing could be done with our plant that night. Fortunately our theatre was one of the few where the architect had remembered that it is useful to have windows in a playhouse, which save the expense of artificial light in the daytime and can be

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

darkened by shutters during a performance. Accordingly, we threw back our shutters, and let the summer evening light flood the auditorium and stage. Coming, as it did, from behind the audience it gave a soft illumination with enough visibility for the actors to be well seen. Over the "grid" was a huge skylight which threw a beam of light on the centre of the stage. The effect was that of floodlighting and, as we never used footlights for our Shakespearean productions, the stage bore this novelty of daylight well. We managed to get as far as the third scene of Act I just as the light began to fade, and we reached the end of it in twilight. Meanwhile we had laid in a stock of candles, and had turned into candlesticks all the empty wine bottles from the cellars. Before we began Act II the whole company paraded in front of the curtains from one side, each actor carrying a candle stuck in a bottle which was placed in front of the stage, the bearer then making his bow to the audience before going off at the other side. These gave a good lighting for the early part of the act, but as the brief candles burnt down they fell into the bottles, which burst with a bang. When we reached the death scene all the bottles had perished and Desdemona had to die by the light of three acetylene bicycle lamps held by the electricians. Our audience were patient and sympathetic. By working all Saturday night and Sunday we got our plant ready to work for Monday night.

While I was at Nottingham we considered the possibility of establishing a three-town circuit so that each of them would have a change of play and players for three

AFTER

weeks at a time. This, of course, would have meant having three companies, but it would have limited production expenses to seventeen weeks a year instead of at least twenty-six. Owing to lack of co-operation, however, the idea had to be abandoned, which was sad, for it is the only way I can conceive of making repertory financially sound. As a second-best policy we tried taking the company to other towns and booking touring companies for the weeks we were away. One of these touring plays was *Tons of Money*, the week after its production in the provinces and before it went to London. Among our visitors were Miss Viola Tree, in Zangwill's *Too Much Money*, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in *Hedda Gabler*. I remember one evening, after the show, my wife and I went round to Mrs. Pat's dressing-room to talk shop, and she said to me, "What have you got for all the years you have spent in the theatre? Obviously not money, you're too happy-looking to have done that." I replied, "A very amusing rich life, the pleasure of meeting and knowing hundreds of people of all sorts—for I like to collect human beings as others do stamps—and the chance to teach some of the younger actors all that older ones have taught me about acting since I began nearly forty years ago. What have you got?" "The conviction," said she, "that I know my job as an actress and I know that I know it."

Towards the end of 1922 the post-war slump was at its worst. All the theatres suffered, but the repertory theatres worst of all. Miss Compton made an appeal to the big business men of Nottingham for help to

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

keep the theatre open until better times. It met with a generous response from Sir Jesse Boot, Mr. Jardine, Mr. John Player and others. I did what I could to lighten the ship by resigning and thus terminating my three happy years in the town.

In the spring of 1923 I was engaged by Sir Gerald du Maurier for a play, written by Miss Viola Tree and himself, called *The Dancers*. I had never worked under him before. I found him amazingly skilful at getting the utmost out of his company. Without ever seeming to interfere with their work he was all the time quietly moulding them into what he wanted. This last he always knew, and if an artist could not get it, du Maurier could do what many producers cannot, that is, come up on the stage and act it himself. His own part never varied a jot from one night to another, and it was as perfect the night the play finished as it was at the opening performance. He had an extraordinarily equable temper too, a rare thing in the profession. All the time I was in the theatre I never heard him utter a cross word, no matter what went wrong. I must add this about *The Dancers*. The first act took place in the bar of a "saloon" in a shack town in Canada during a cabaret entertainment of singing and dancing. The star dancer, Maxine, was played by a young American actress making her first appearance in London. Since then she has become famous both in the theatre and on the screen—Miss Tallulah Bankhead. Dancing was at the height of its popularity at that time and the play ran for forty-two weeks.

When Jack de Leon opened his little theatre at

AFTER

Kew Bridge, he tried a new experiment, which was to produce a new play one week and an old one the week following, to give time to get another new one ready for the next week. He had Milton Rosmer to produce the new ones, while I did the others, such as *The Barton Mystery*, *The Land of Promise* and *Eliza Comes to Stay*. As the theatre was so near London there was no difficulty in getting good casts, and the scenery was made and painted in the theatre by Harry Crane. The seating capacity was so small that it was only by Jack de Leon's faculty for making a shilling go as far as a pound that he was able to make a profitable margin between his expenses and receipts. During the first year a remarkable number of the new productions went to the West End, and the standard of the performances made the "Q" theatre capable of drawing its audiences not only from Hammersmith to Richmond, but also from less accessible and more fashionable parts of London.

CHAPTER IV

It is bad enough, I suppose, to be an Irishman, but to be an actor as well means a double allowance of the agreeable vice of casualness—unless, of course, as some say, Irishman and actor are identical terms. I have just told how in 1920 I went to Nottingham for a few weeks and stayed for three years. I did much the same at Birmingham. In March 1926, Sir Barry Jackson needed his producer, H. K. Aylliffe, in London, and invited me to fill the place at Birmingham for six months. Poor man, it was two and a half years before he got quit of me.

The origins of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre were much like those of the Abbey. It had begun with the "Pilgrim Players," a group of amateurs, headed by Barry Jackson, that played for six years with ever-increasing success. At the end of that time they were so well established that he built the beautiful little theatre in Station Street as a permanent home for their activities, and most of them became professionals, including the manager, Bache Matthews. The work was peculiarly congenial to me, for the plays were chosen for production, not because they were possible commercial successes, but of dramatic importance in Europe or America. A new play was produced each fortnight, so that each one got twelve performances in the evenings and two matinées. While it was running the next play was rehearsed. This gave ample time for any competent repertory company to give a finished performance.

AFTER

There was not only time in which to get the plays ready, but no reasonable expense was spared. The costumes and scenes were designed by Paul Shelving, the most original artist in the country for colour and form in stage decoration. When he had to leave Birmingham for the Royalty Theatre, London, his work was taken over by his able assistants, Hugh Owen and Ben Healey, who undertook not only the designing of the scenes but the painting of them as well.

Most of the plays were modern—Pirandello's *Così è se vi Pare* and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* were among those of my time. But we did occasional costume pieces like Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* and Garrick's *The Country Girl*. We staged *The Country Girl* precisely as it was done in Garrick's own time—changing the scenes in view of the audience, and having the furniture moved by servants in livery. We even had the stage lighted by candelabra of the period. The copy of the play that I used contained a list of the various scenes with the times they played at the first performance at Drury Lane. When the company knew their lines well enough for us to time the scenes as we rehearsed them, I found that our pace was only about half of what Garrick's had been, according to the book. I kept speeding up until the company complained that if they spoke any more rapidly they could not manage their articulation, to which I replied that if Garrick's actors could do it we ought to be able to keep the same time and get the play "over." I remembered William Poel's receipt for getting pace in

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

his productions by stressing the important words in a sentence and leaving the rest to look after themselves. After giving the company a little practice in this method of speaking lines I timed the scenes again, and found to my surprise that we had actually beaten Garrick by six minutes, and yet every word was, as it should be, audible in any part of the theatre. The fast pace improved the play immensely. I am certain that the old comedies need rapid playing if they are to be as good "theatre" as they were when they were originally produced.

But, as I have said, the majority of our productions were modern plays of all sorts and from all countries. This variety was of the greatest value both to actors and to audiences. To the former it gave range and accomplishment and it educated the latter in critical values. Just as the Abbey Theatre taught the public and Press what an Irish play should be, so the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on a larger scale has given its public a real knowledge and understanding of the modern drama, both native and foreign. Except in London at the Stage Society and at the Liverpool Playhouse, where Mr. Armstrong has done such fine work, there are no audiences in Great Britain to compare with those of the Birmingham Repertory for real critical intelligence. And it is a very sad thing to have to say that, for instead of only three there ought to be scores of such audiences all over the country. Every considerable town should have its repertory theatre. It could be done handsomely at a cost equal to less than a farthing rate. A Playgoers'



PRODUCING "THE SILVER BOX," BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY
THEATRE

AFTER

Society in connexion with such a theatre would form the nucleus of a permanent audience. The theatre would be a meeting-place for all who were interested in the æsthetic side of the people's education, recognising that the arts are as necessary to a full life as our sports and that "where no vision is the people perish." This is the only kind of playhouse that can afford to produce, experimentally, the work of young authors. The ordinary theatre proprietor cannot, for the plays he produces must be of the particular type that happens to be popular at the time if he doesn't want to lose money. Thus, while I was producing for Sir Barry Jackson, we put on five plays that had never before been seen on any stage—*Something to Talk About* by Eden Phillpotts, *The Third Finger* by R. R. Whittaker (produced afterwards at Hampstead), *The Mannoch Family* by Murray McClymont, *A Comedy of Good and Evil* by Richard Hughes, and *Aren't Women Wonderful?* by Harris Deans (afterwards produced in London at the Royal Court Theatre). Some of the younger members of our company have since become stars in London—Peggy Ashcroft, Jessica Tandy, Edward Chapman (who came to the front as Ackroyd in *The Good Companions* at His Majesty's), Ralph Richardson and our youngest actor, Laurence Olivier, who, after starring in London in *Beau Geste* and other plays, has just gone to Hollywood to play opposite to Greta Garbo.

During my last year in Birmingham, I was asked to give a series of lectures to the Dramatic Club at Bournville. This was my first experience in lecturing

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

on the drama. The class was enthusiastic, and I began by getting them to read a play, then explaining to them the acting technique required, which was followed by a demonstration rehearsal. At the end of the season I took an intensive school for amateur producers at the Moseley Hall, where I had pupils from nearly every dramatic society in Birmingham. I took them through demonstration rehearsals of three plays—one Shakespeare, one old comedy and one modern. I have used such demonstration rehearsals wherever I have been director of studies at a drama school. I believe it is the only way to give a large amount of teaching of acting in a short time.

I got back to London just in time to produce at the Arts Theatre Vera Beringer's translation and dramatisation of Feuchtwanger's novel *The Ugly Duchess*. To many who saw it, as to myself, it is a far finer play than its predecessor, *Jew Süss*, and Esmé Beringer gave the performance of a lifetime as the Duchess. Her make-up took three months to perfect and, when finished, it was a facsimile of the only existing portrait of that unfortunate lady.

In August 1928 the British Drama League opened at St. Andrews the first Scottish Summer Drama School, to which I went as lecturer and teacher of acting, and, as the University was in vacation, we were able to hold it in the Women Students' Hostel. It was attended by pupils from all parts of Scotland and of all ages, from sixteen to sixty. Our syllabus included lectures every morning and evening, making and designing model scenery, lessons in making

AFTER

costumes and demonstration rehearsals. We wound up with a "Mummers' Party" at which the pupils had an opportunity of showing how much they had learned during the session. I had gone to St. Andrews thinking that three or four hours' work a day would leave me plenty of time to get a sea breeze down by the golf links. Actually we worked about nine hours a day, but the enthusiasm was such that I only wished we could have carried on all through the year. So successful was the school with Miss MacNamara's organisation that Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, the secretary of the Drama League, arranged a similar one for the next year, since when it has become an annual event conducted by the Scottish Community Drama Society (the Scottish section of the British Drama League) with an ever-increasing number of pupils. It is possible that before long St. Andrews will have a permanent drama school like those attached to the universities of Harvard and Yale.

I had an invitation from the Drama League some time afterwards to adjudicate in Glasgow at the Festival and choose the team to represent Scotland at the final Festival in London held for the Howard de Walden Cup. This was the first opportunity I had of seeing the actual results achieved by the Drama League. The rapid growth of the movement is one of the most striking social phenomena of recent years. When I adjudicated in 1929 the eight finalists had been selected from eighty-four competing teams. Now, I believe, the competing teams of Scotland number something in the neighbourhood of four hundred—

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

an astonishing figure when one remembers that it does not include numerous dramatic societies that devote their energies to full-length plays and opera. Community drama has added immensely to the amenities of life in villages and small towns, from which most of these teams come, for rehearsals and the making of scenery and costumes are a grand occupation. Now the Women's Institutes are competing and are sending more and more teams to the festivals each year. In 1934 the total entries in Great Britain were over a thousand. Another result of the movement has been to create a flourishing market for one-act plays, which could hardly be said to exist in the days when a "one-acter" was only wanted as an occasional curtain-raiser. The interest aroused by these new little plays is helping to create an intelligent playgoing public all over the country.

In the autumn of 1929 I went to Wolverhampton to produce for Mr. Salberg in conditions that were new to me, viz. for a "twice-nightly" house, which involved ruthless cutting. However, in Ireland I had had some experience of cutting long plays. Mr. Salberg staged a new play each Monday night. So we had to start our rehearsals of the next one on Tuesday, when I roughed out the position and indicated the business for each scene. On Wednesday we went right through the play with all the cast arranged. On Thursday the company had a day to study their parts, while the stage manager and I went round the town collecting furniture, carpets, pictures, electric fittings, etc. to be delivered at the theatre

AFTER

first thing on Monday morning. If we were lucky we got the stage on Friday to rehearse on, and on Saturday maybe some of the scenes might be available, but more often we had to make do with substitutes. Sunday being a day of rest, the stage carpenter, scenic artist, stage manager and I spent it getting the scenery ready for the next day. One Sunday we wanted a full-size Venetian scene for a backing, and as the time was short the artist painted one side of it while I did the other, making an invisible join in the middle. On Monday morning the assistant stage manager heard the company recite their lines in the rehearsal room, while we got the scenes set, dressed, and lit ready for the night. Even with our Sunday work, if the play had many scenes, the artists and I were often putting the finishing touches to the first scene when the orchestra was playing the overture for the first house. Playing twice nightly is hard labour for all engaged. The actors and staff are in the theatre from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m. or later, then back again from 6 p.m. until 11. The first house on Monday is really only a dress rehearsal, but unfortunately it decides whether the week's business is going to be good or bad. Twice-nightly performances are not the highest art, but they help the theatre by enabling the public to see plays of acknowledged merit at prices that can compete successfully with the cinema. They give permanent employment to staff and actors, and there is no better training ground in which performers can learn the rudiments of their business.

My next move found me back in Glasgow again, this

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

time as producer to the Scottish National Players. The company, which was an amateur one, had been organised ten years before with the idea of doing for Scotland what the Irish Players had done for Ireland. We gave our performances at the Lyric Theatre (formerly the Royalty), which had been the home of the Glasgow Repertory Theatre under Alfred Wareing's direction. The dramatists that supplied the Players included "John Brandane" and Robins Millar, both of whom have had plays done in London; Donald MacLaren, Joe Corrie, Hal Stewart, Murray McClymont, Norman Macowan (whose *Infinite Shoeblack* had a success at the Ambassadors' Theatre) and, most important of all, "James Bridie," who needs no introduction, especially since he has written mine for me. The company had to rehearse in the evening after their own day's work elsewhere. I thought them every bit as good in their Scots plays as my Irish Players had been in theirs, and it was a revelation to me to see a play like *What Every Woman Knows* in the hands of an all-Scottish cast.

Production was by no means the only activity of my Glasgow days. Robins Millar let me do a weekly article on acting for the Saturday edition of the *Glasgow Evening News*, with "hints on production," covering sixteen weeks, and Donald Sutherland, then editor of *Scottish Country Life*, commissioned one a month for six months, dealing with both acting and production. When the first season finished I was engaged by the Scottish Community Drama Society to undertake a lecture tour for them. At first I found it difficult to

AFTER

speaking from notes for eighty minutes, and afterwards to reply to questions, keeping my audience entertained all the time. But on reaching Fort William, the last town of my itinerary, I had become expert enough to give my lectures without using a note. Also it was easier for me to speak extempore on a subject that was so familiar to me than to piece a set lecture together from guiding scraps provided beforehand. I always felt myself losing touch with my audience when I had to look at a bit of paper.

Before leaving London I had completed my *Glossary of Theatrical Terms* which I had begun while in Birmingham. I wanted to get into print a list of the technical terms used in the theatre, for I had found that often young actors did not know even the names of many things used on the stage, or if they knew the names, they did not know the definitions. It is a modest work, but I hope it may some day, in the hands of a more competent person, form the nucleus of what is much needed, a proper theatrical dictionary. Mr. Whitworth gave it space in *Drama* and afterwards Messrs. French published it together with a later book, *A Simple Stage and the Scenery for it*. This latter book I wrote and illustrated to help amateurs who were beginning to take an interest in the technique of stage and scenery in the hope that it would teach them how to do those simple things that most books on the theatre take for granted. Amateurs away in villages must find it difficult to get exact and detailed information. I know I did, even living in so big a town as Dublin. In yet another little book, *Merely Players*, I

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

have followed the same idea in regard to the rudiments both of acting and producing plays.

In December 1932 Mr. Anmer Hall engaged me to produce, at the Westminster Theatre, *Alice, Thomas and Jane*, the first "thriller" ever written as a children's play and the first children's play I have done in which there are no fairies or Red Indians. It had been skilfully adapted by Vera Beringer, from Enid Bagnold's book, and our audiences seemed to enjoy their juvenile "Edgar Wallace" by way of a change.

Before I close, I may as well confess that I am always glad to take a film part when I can get one. As early as 1916 I played small parts, though what the results were like I never knew, for I never saw them on the screen. Not long ago I finished my first "talkie" parts—in *The Blarney Stone* with Tom Walls, and my old part of Golligher in *General John Regan* with Henry Edwards. Now I am faced with the prospect not only of seeing myself as others see me—an unlooked-for experience for the old-fashioned actor—but, what is more trying and interesting, of hearing myself as well. How eagerly an actor like Charles Hawtrey or an actress like Ellen Terry would have welcomed such an opportunity! In my case I expect to feel like a brother actor who, as he came away from the trade show of his first film, said, "I don't think I want to act in films. They make one look such a bounder, don't you know."

I like film work. It is a relief to be told what to do and where to stand instead of having to tell others or make up one's mind about one's own part. The

AFTER

technique is so different from that of the theatre that it takes time to accommodate oneself to the change. Instead of being a conscious pivot upon which the whole play moves, the film actor is only a tiny part of the machinery like the camera, the microphone, the lights and a hundred other bolts and screws. You have no idea what you look or sound like, for the sound machine can do queer things with your voice and you never speak more than a couple of speeches at a time, with little knowledge of their relation to the whole. It is a new method of acting and one that holds enormous possibilities in the future for those that can master it. But I do not at all agree with pessimists who declare that the theatre cannot survive the competition of the music-hall, the cinema and the wireless. On the contrary, I hold that the great variety of entertainment provided for the public will only make them into more appreciative theatre audiences. They will come to the play instead of to animated photographs when they want the vicarious experience of the subtler, more intimate phases of human life as created by the dramatist and portrayed by the actor. So long as an individual artist like Ruth Draper can fill a large theatre, and people a stage, empty save for herself, with human beings, there will always be a demand for pure acting. The theatre has been in existence as part of the cultural life of civilised nations for over a thousand years, and it will still be wanted another millennium hence, when all mechanised imitations and reproductions of the living being shall perhaps have returned to the shadows whence they came.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS, WITH CASTS

On 2nd, 3rd and 4th April, 1902.

“DEIRDRE,” a Play in three acts, by “Æ.”

Produced by W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company
at the Hall of St. Theresa's, Clarendon St., Dublin.

DEIRDRE	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.
LAVARCAM	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
FERGUS	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
BUIÑNE	.	.	.	.	P. Colum.
ILLAUN	.	.	.	.	C. Caulfield.
ARDAN	.	.	.	.	F. Ryan.
AINLE	.	.	.	.	H. Sproule.
NAISI	.	.	.	.	J. Dudley Digges.
MESSSENGER	.	.	.	.	Brian Callender.
CONCOBAR	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.

and

“KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN,” by W. B. Yeats, a Play in
one act.

KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN	.	.	Maud Gonne.
DELIA CAHEL	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
BRIDGET GILLAN	.	.	M. T. Quinn.
PATRICK GILLAN	.	.	C. Caulfield.
MICHAEL GILLAN	.	.	J. Dudley Digges.
PETER GILLAN	.	.	W. G. Fay.

December 4th, 5th and 6th, 1902, at 34 Lower Camden
Street, the Irish National Theatre Society produced

“THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATIONS,” a Play in two acts
by Fred Ryan.

MR. O'LOSIN, T.C.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
MICHAEL	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
ALDERMAN FARRELLY	.	.	J. Dudley Digges.
MR. MACFADDEN, T.C.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
MR. NOLAN, <i>Editor</i>	.	.	N. Butler.
MRS. O'LOSIN	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
MRS. MACFADDEN	.	.	Honor Lavelle.
EILEEN	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

“A POT OF BROTH,” a Farce in one act by W. B. Yeats.

A BEGGARMAN	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
SIBBY	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.
JOHN	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.

“EILIS AGUS AN BEAN DEIRCE,” a Play in one act by
P. T. McGINLEY.

EILIS	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.
CONCUBAR	.	.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
MEADDA	.	.	.	.	Maire ni Perols.

and

“THE RACING LUG,” a One-Act Play of Real Life in two
scenes by Seamus O. Cuisin.

JOHNNY	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
NANCY	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.
BELL	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
ROB	.	.	.	.	J. E. Sheridan.
REV. MR. McMEEKIN	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.

and his One-Act Play, “THE SLEEP OF THE KING,” was produced later that year.

The Irish National Theatre Society produced on Saturday, 14th March, 1903, at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin,

“THE HOUR-GLASS,” a Morality Play in one act by
W. B. Yeats.

THE WISEMAN	.	.	.	.	J. Dudley Digges.
BRIGIT	.	.	.	.	Maire T. Quinn.
HIS CHILDREN	.	.	.	.	{ Eithne and Padragan Nic Shiubhlaigh.
					{ P. J. Kelly.
HIS PUPILS	.	.	.	.	{ Seumas O’Sullivan.
					{ P. Colum.
					{ P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
THE ANGEL	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
THE FOOL	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.

“TWENTY-FIVE,” a Play in one act, by Lady Gregory.

MICHAEL FORD	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
KATE FORD	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
CHRISTIE HENDERSON	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
A NEIGHBOUR	.	.	.	.	Dora Hackett.
ANOTHER NEIGHBOUR	.	.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

The Irish National Theatre Society produced at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on October 8th, 9th and 10th, 1903,

“THE KING’S THRESHOLD,” a Play in one act and in verse by
W. B. Yeats.

KING GUAIRE	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
THE CHAMBERLAIN	.	.	.	.	Seumas O’Sullivan.
A SOLDIER	.	.	.	.	W. Conroy.
A MONK	.	.	.	.	S. Sheridan-Neill.
THE MAYOR OF KINVARA	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
A CRIPPLE	.	.	.	.	P. Colum.
ANOTHER CRIPPLE	.	.	.	.	E. Davis.
AILEEN	} <i>Court ladies</i>	.	.	.	{ Honor Lavelle.
ESSA		.	.	.	
PRINCESS BUAN	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
FEDELM (<i>Seanchan’s sweetheart</i>)	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
CIAN	} <i>his servants</i>	.	.	.	{ P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
BRIAN		.	.	.	
PRINCESS FINNHUA	.	.	.	.	Doreen Gunning.
SENIAS	} <i>pupils</i>	.	.	.	{ G. Roberts.
ARIAS		.	.	.	
SEANCHAN	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.

“IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN,” a Play in one act by
J. M. Synge.

DAN BURKE	.	.	.	.	G. Roberts.
NORA BURKE	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
MICHAEL DARA	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
A TRAMP	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.

The Irish National Theatre Society, at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, produced on December 3rd, 4th and 5th, 1903,

“BROKEN SOIL,” a Play in three acts by
Padraic MacCormac Colum

CON HOURICAN	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
BRIAN MACCONNELL	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
BRIGIT MACCONNELL	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
ANNE KILBRIDE	.	.	.	.	Honor Lavelle.
MARIE HOURICAN	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

The Irish National Theatre Society produced at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on 14th, 15th and 16th January, 1904,

"THE SHADOWY WATERS," a Dramatic Poem by
W. B. Yeats.

FORGAEL	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
AIBRIC	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
HELMSMAN	.	.	.	.	Seumas O'Sullivan.
SAILORS	.	.	.	.	G. Roberts.
					P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
					U. Wright.
DECTORA	.	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
PROLOGUE	.	.	.	.	Honor Lavelle.

"THE TOWNLAND OF TAMNEY," a Folk Play in one act by
Seumas MacManus.

THE WISE MAN	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
FEARGAL	.	.	.	.	De Courcy Millar.
CONAL	.	.	.	.	G. Roberts.
DONAL	.	.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
TEAGUE	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.

At the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on 25th, 26th and 27th
February, 1904,

"RIDERS TO THE SEA," a Play in one act by J. M. Synge.

MAURYA	.	.	.	.	Honor Lavelle.
BARTLEY	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
CATHLEEN	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
NORA	.	.	.	.	Emma Vernon.
					Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
					Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.
					Doreen Gunning.
MEN AND WOMEN	.	.	.	.	P. J. Kelly.
					Seumas O'Sullivan.
					G. Roberts.

On Tuesday, December 27th, 1904, first production by the Irish National Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, opening performance,

"ON BAILE'S STRAND," a Play in one act by W. B. Yeats.

CUCHULLAIN	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
CONCOBAR	.	.	.	.	George Roberts.
DAIRE	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

FINTAIN	Seumas O'Sullivan.
BARACH	W. G. Fay.
A YOUNG MAN	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.
	Emma Vernon.
	Sara Allgood.
YOUNG KINGS and OLD KINGS	Doreen Gunning.
	R. Nash.
	N. Power.
	U. Wright.
	E. Keegan.

Costumes designed by Miss A. E. F. Horniman.

"SPREADING THE NEWS," a Comedy in one act by
Lady Gregory.

BARTLEY FALLON	W. G. Fay.
MRS. FALLON	Sara Allgood.
MRS. TULLY	Emma Vernon.
MRS. TARPEY	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.
SHAWN EARLY	J. H. Dunne.
TIM CASEY	George Roberts.
JAMES RYAN	Arthur Sinclair.
JACK SMITH	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
POLICEMAN	R. S. Nash.
A REMOVABLE MAGISTRATE	F. J. Fay.

Also revivals of "KATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN" and
"IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN."

On Saturday, February 4th, 1905, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"THE WELL OF THE SAINTS," a Play in three acts by
J. M. Synge.

MARTIN DOUL	W. G. Fay.
MARY DOUL	Emma Vernon.
TIMMY	George Roberts.
MOLLY BYRNE	Sara Allgood.
BRIDE	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
MAT SIMON	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
A WANDERING FRIAR	F. J. Fay.

Scenery designed by Pamela Coleman Smith.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

On Saturday, 25th March, 1905, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,
the Irish National Theatre Society produced,

"KINCORA," a Play in three acts by Lady Gregory.

BRIAN OF THE TRIBUTES	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
MURROUGH	.	.	.	George Roberts.
MALACHI	.	.	.	A. Power.
GORMLEITH	.	.	.	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
SITRIC	.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
MAELMORA	.	.	.	Seumas O'Sullivan.
BRENNAIN	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
DERRICK	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
RURY	.	.	.	J. Dunn.
PHELAN	.	.	.	U. Wright.
MAIRE	.	.	.	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.
AOIBHELL	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
BRODAR	.	.	.	R. Nash.
A DANE	.	.	.	U. Wright.

Scenery and costumes designed by Robert Gregory.

On Tuesday, 25th April, 1905, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"THE BUILDING FUND," a Comedy in three acts by
William Boyle.

MRS. GROGAN	.	.	.	Emma Vernon.
SHAN GROGAN	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
SHEILA O'DWYER	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
MICHAEL O'CALLAGHAN	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
DAN MACSWEENEY	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.

On Friday, 9th June, 1905, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"THE LAND," a Play in three acts by Padraic Colum.

MURTAGH COSGAR	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
MATT	.	.	.	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
SALLY	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
MARTIN DOURAS	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
CORNELIUS	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
ELLEN	.	.	.	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.

This was the last play produced by the Irish National Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin; the Society was disbanded and the work taken over by the National Theatre Society, Ltd.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

On Saturday, 9th December, 1905, the National Theatre Society, Ltd., produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"THE WHITE COCKADE," a Comedy in three acts by
Lady Gregory.

PATRICK SARSFIELD	F. J. Fay.
KING JAMES II	Arthur Sinclair.
CARTER	J. H. Dunn.
A POOR LADY	Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh.
MATT KELLEHER	W. G. Fay.
MARY KELLEHER	Sara Allgood.
OWEN KELLEHER	P. Mac Shiubhlaigh.
FRENCH SAILORS	{ Walter S. Magee.
	{ Edward Keegan.
FIRST WILLIAMITE	A. Power.
SECOND WILLIAMITE	U. Wright.
WILLIAMITE CAPTAIN	M. Butler.

On Saturday, 20th January, 1906, the National Theatre Society, Ltd., produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"THE ELOQUENT DEMPSEY," a Comedy in three acts by
William Boyle.

JEREMIAH DEMPSEY	W. G. Fay.
CATHERINE DEMPSEY	Sara Allgood.
MARY KATE	Brigit O'Dempsey.
DR. BUNBURY, J.P. . . .	F. J. Fay.
CAPTAIN MCNAMARA, J.P. . .	Arthur Sinclair.
MIKE FLANAGAN	J. H. Dunne.
BRIAN O'NEILL	U. Wright.

On Monday, 19th February, 1906, the National Theatre Society, Ltd., produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,

"HYACINTH HALVEY," a Comedy in one act by
Lady Gregory.

HYACINTH HALVEY	F. J. Fay.
JAMES QUIRKE	W. G. Fay.
FARDY FARRELL	Arthur Sinclair.
SERGEANT CARDEN	Walter McGee.
MRS. DELANE	Sara Allgood.
MISS JOYCE	Brigit O'Dempsey.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

On Monday, 16th April, 1906, the National Theatre Society produced at the Abbey Theatre,

“THE DOCTOR IN SPITE OF HIMSELF,” a Farce in three acts
by Molière, translated by Lady Gregory.

SGANARELLE	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
MARTHA	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
ROBERT	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
VALERE	.	.	.	.	A. Power.
LUKE	.	.	.	.	U. Wright.
GERONTE	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
JACQUELINE	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
LUCY	.	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
LEEANE	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.

On Saturday, 20th October, 1906, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, the National Theatre Society produced

“THE MINERAL WORKERS,” a Play in three acts by William
Boyle.

SIR THOMAS MUSGROVE	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
MRS. WALTON	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
STEPHEN J. O'REILLY	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
DAN FOGARTY	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
NED MULROY	.	.	.	.	A. Power.
MARY	.	.	.	.	Alice O'Sullivan.
PATRICK	.	.	.	.	U. Wright.
KITTY	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
UNCLE BARTLE	.	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
MR. CASEY, P.L.G.	.	.	.	.	H. Young
DICK	.	.	.	.	Shaun Barlow.

and

“THE GAOL GATE,” a Tragedy in one act by Lady
Gregory.

MARY CASHEL	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
MARY CUSHIN	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
THE GATE-KEEPER	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.

On November 24th, 1906, the National Theatre Society produced at the Abbey Theatre,

“DEIRDRE,” a Play in Verse by W. B. Yeats.

CONCOBAR	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
FERGUS	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

NAISI	F. J. Fay.
MESSINGER	U. Wright.
EXECUTIONER	A. Power.
FIRST MUSICIAN	Sara Allgood.
SECOND MUSICIAN	Maire O'Neill.
THIRD MUSICIAN	Brigit O'Dempsey.
DEIRDRE	Miss Darragh.

Scenery by Robert Gregory; Music by Arthur Darley.

And

"THE CANAVANS," a Comedy in three acts by Lady Gregory.

PETER CANAVAN	W. G. Fay.
ANTONY CANAVAN	J. A. O'Rourke.
CAPTAIN HEADLEY	Arthur Sinclair.
WIDOW GREELY	Brigit O'Dempsey.
WIDOW DEENY	Maire O'Neill.

On Saturday, 8th December, 1906,

"THE SHADOWY WATERS," a Play in Verse by W. B. Yeats.

DECTORA	Miss Darragh.
FORGAEL	F. J. Fay.
AIBRIC	Arthur Sinclair.
SAILORS	U. Wright.
	A. Power.
	J. A. O'Rourke.
	J. M. Kerrigan.

On Saturday, 26th January, 1907,

"THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD," a Comedy in three acts by J. M. Synge.

CHRISTOPHER MAHON	W. G. Fay.
OLD MAHON	A. Power.
MICHAEL JAMES FLAHERTY	Arthur Sinclair.
MARGARET FLAHERTY	Maire O'Neill.
SHAWN KEOGH	F. J. Fay.
PHILLY O'CULLEN	J. A. O'Rourke.
JIMMY FARRELL	J. M. Kerrigan.
WIDOW QUINN	Sara Allgood.
SARA TANSEY	Brigit O'Dempsey.
SUSAN BRADY	Alice O'Sullivan.
HONOR BLAKE	Mary Craig.
PEASANTS	U. Wright.
	Harry Young.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

On Saturday, 23rd February, 1907,

"THE JACKDAW," a Comedy in one act by Lady Gregory.

JOSEPH NESTOR	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
MICHAEL COONEY	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
MRS. BRODERICK	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
TOMMY NALLY	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
SIBBY FAHY	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
TIMOTHY WARD	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.

On Saturday, March 9th, 1907,

"THE RISING OF THE MOON," a Play in one act by Lady Gregory.

BALLAD SINGER	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
POLICEMAN X	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
POLICEMAN B	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
POLICEMAN Z	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.

On March 16th, 1907,

"THE INTERIOR," a Play in one act by Maurice Maeterlinck.

THE OLD MAN	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
THE STRANGER	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
MARTHA	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
MARY	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
PEASANT	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
THE FATHER	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
THE MOTHER	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
THE SISTERS	.	.	.	{ Annie Allgood. B. Warrington.

On April 1st, 1907,

"THE EYES OF THE BLIND," a Play in one act by
Winifred M. Letts.

MRS. DOYNE	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
THERESA DOYNE	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
LAWRENCE SHAUGHNESSY	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
BLIND PHELM	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

On April 3rd, 1907,

"THE POORHOUSE," a Comedy in one act by Lady Gregory
and Dr. Douglas Hyde.

COLUM	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
PAUDEEN	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
THE MATRON	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
A COUNTRY WOMAN	.	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.

On April 20th, 1907,

"FAND," a Verse Play in two acts by Wilfrid Scawen
Blunt.

CUCHULAIN	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
CONCHUBAR	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
LAEG	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
LAEGAIRE	.	.	.	.	Ernest Vaughan.
LUGAID	.	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
EMER	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
FAND	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
EITHNE	.	.	.	.	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh.
ATTENDANTS	.	.	.	.	{ Brigit O'Dempsey. Annie Allgood.

On Thursday, October 3rd, 1907,

"THE COUNTRY DRESSMAKER," a Comedy in three acts by
George Fitzmaurice.

JULIA SHEA	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
NORRY SHEA	.	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
MATT DILLANE	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
MIN	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
PATS CONNOR	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
EDMUND NORMYLE	.	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
MICHAEL CLOHESY	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
MARYANNE	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
BABE	.	.	.	.	Eileen O'Doherty.
ELLIE	.	.	.	.	Kathleen Mullamphy.
JACK	.	.	.	.	T. J. Fox.
LUKE QUILTER	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.

LIST OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS

On Thursday, October 31st, 1907,

“DEVORGILLA,” a Tragedy in one act by Lady Gregory.

DEVORGILLA	.	.	.	.	Sara Allgood.
FLANN	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
MONA	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
OWEN	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
MAMIE	.	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.
WANDERING JESTER	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
YOUNG MEN	.	.	.	.	{ Arthur Sinclair.
					{ J. A. O'Rourke.
GIRL	.	.	.	.	Kathleen Mullanphy.

On Thursday, November 21st, 1907,

“THE UNICORN FROM THE STARS,” a Play in three acts by
Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats.

FATHER JOHN	.	.	.	.	Ernest Vaughan.
THOMAS HEARNE	.	.	.	.	Arthur Sinclair.
ANDREW HEARNE	.	.	.	.	J. A. O'Rourke.
MARTIN HEARNE	.	.	.	.	F. J. Fay.
JOHNNY BACACH	.	.	.	.	W. G. Fay.
PAUDEEN	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan.
BIDDY LALLY	.	.	.	.	Maire O'Neill.
NANNY	.	.	.	.	Brigit O'Dempsey.

This was the last play I produced for the National Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, being the twenty-third, and there were thirteen before we had a theatre of our own.

INDEX

- A Pot of Broth*, 125, 128, 129,
 132, 156, 243, 244
 Abbey Theatre, 105-231 *passim*
 Aberdeen, 202
 Actors' Association, The, 270,
 271
 Adams, Maude, 243
 "Æ" (G. W. Russell), 105,
 115-120, 123, 148, 149,
 158 n., 164
 Allgood, Sara, 136, 146, 151,
 178, 190, 191, 208, 263
An Enemy of the People, 108, 109
 Annesley, Dora L., 158 n.
 Antoine, André, 108
 Aran Islands, 137
 Archer, William, 107, 133
 Armstrong, William, 210, 288
 Asquith, the Right Hon. H. H.,
 259, 260
 Ayliffe, H. K., 264, 286

 Bailey, H. E., 81-85
 Bankhead, Tallulah, 284
 Barker, H. Granville, 206, 236,
 257, 259
 Barrie, Sir J. M., 155, 173, 237,
 238, 240, 243
 Benevente, Jacinto, 265
 Bennett, Arnold, 167, 173, 248,
 277, 278
 Benson, Sir F. R., 114, 115
 Beringer, Esmé, 290
 Beringer, Vera, 290
 Birmingham Repertory Thea-
 tre, 226, 286-290
 Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen, 225
 Boyle, William, 173, 174, 188,
 189, 191, 205, 206, 216, 236,
 245
Brand, 264

 "Bridie, James," Foreword
 and 294
 British Drama League, 290-292
Broken Soil, 145-147, 156
 Bronson, 57-59

 Callender, Brian, 118, 120
 Cambridge, 181, 182
 Campbell, Mrs. Patrick, 195,
 283
 Campbell-Bannerman, the
 Right Hon. Sir Henry, 155
 Carr, Philip, 268, 269
 Carswell, Catherine, Foreword
 and Postscript
Casad an Sugan, 114
 Caulfield, C., 118, 120, 121
 Chicago, 245-247
 Colum, Padraic, 118, 123, 130,
 144-148, 156, 175
 Compton, Mrs. Edward, 279,
 283
 Compton, Viola and Ellen,
 280
 Coronation performances, 256,
 260
Così è se vi Pare, 287
 Courtney of Penwith, Lord,
 155
 Cousins, James, 115, 118, 120,
 123, 125
 Cumann na nGaedéal, 110,
 113, 119

 Dalton, Frank, 52
 Darley, Arthur, 188, 198, 201,
 203, 206, 208
 Darragh, Miss, 207-210
 De Leon, Jack, 284, 285
 Dean, Basil, 274, 275, 277
Deirdre ("Æ"), 115-121

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

- Deirdre* (W. B. Yeats), 207-209
Devorgilla, 227
Diarmuid and Grania, 114, 115
 Digges, Dudley, 67-70, 118, 120,
 121, 123, 130, 157, 244, 246
 Dillon, John, 164
 Du Maurier, Sir Gerald, 284
 Dunne, J., 182

 Edinburgh, 203
Eilis and the Beggar Woman, 125
 Ervine, St. John, 192
 Esposito, Vera, 158 n., 178
Exiles, 265

Fand, 225
 Fay, Desmond William, 269
 Fay, Frank, 5, 10 *et seq.*, 32,
 35-38, 67, 69, 99, 118, 120,
 123, 130, 146, 152, 158 n.,
 165, 178, 182, 190, 191, 225,
 231, 239, 248-250
 Fay, W. G., *passim*
 Fitzmaurice, George, 227
 Frohman, Charles, 237-242,
 244, 245

 Gaelic League, The, 109
 Garvey, Maire, 158 n., 185
General John Regan, 186, 265-
 268, 296
 Girvan, 54, 55
 Glasgow, 202, 210, 293-295
 Gleeson, Miss, 135
 Gogarty, Oliver St. John, 147,
 121, 149
 Gonne, Maud, 114, 118, 119,
 121, 123
 Gregory, Lady, 105, 111, 118,
 129, 158 and n., 164, 170-
 172, 178, 185, 187, 193, 205,
 206, 209, 210, 222, 227, 228,
 230, 231, 235
 Gregory, Robert, 170-172

 Griffith, Arthur, 105, 110, 113,
 132, 141, 147, 217
 Gwynn, Stephen, 131, 158 n.,
 164

 Hackett, Dora, 130
 Hall, Anmer, 296
 Hawtrey, Sir Charles, 242, 265-
 267
 Holloway, Joseph, 155, 194
 Horniman, Miss, 105, 108, 136,
 143, 144, 152-155, 157-160,
 164, 166, 177, 179-181, 194,
 197, 198, 210, 217, 223, 224,
 227
Hyacinth Halvey, 164, 190
 Hyde, Dr. Douglas, 109, 110,
 114, 123, 158 n.

 Ibsen, Henrik, 108, 109, 264
In the Shadow of the Glen, 136,
 137, 139-141, 156, 182
 Inginide na hEireann, 114, 119,
 120
Interior, 225
 Irish Literary Theatre, 105,
 111, 112, 114
 Irish National Dramatic Com-
 pany, 118
 Irish National Theatre Society,
 123 *et seq.*

 Jackson, Sir Barry, 226, 286
John Bull's Other Island, 206,
 207, 250, 251, 259, 260
 Joyce, James, 149, 265

Kathleen ni Houlihan, 118-121,
 127, 132, 191
 Keegan, E., 182
 Kelly, P. J., 118, 120, 123, 128,
 130, 146, 157
 Keohler, T., 123, 158 n.
 Kerrigan, J. M., 14, 207, 225

INDEX

- Kettle, T. M., 152
 Kinsella, Pat, 22, 53

 Lacy, Mr. and Mrs. J. W., 34-59
 Laird, Helen, 119, 123, 158 n.
 Lane, Hugh, 164
 Lavelle, Honor, 146, 185
 Law, the Right Hon. A. Bonar, 274
Le Médecin malgré Lui, 193, 196
 Leeds, 199
 Lewis, R. B., 71 *et seqq.*
 Leyel, Carl, 274, 275
 Liverpool, 199, 210
 Liverpool Playhouse, 273
 Lloyd's Mexican Circus, 85-95
 London Irish Literary Society, 131, 155
 London, Irish Players' visits to, 131-134, 155, 156, 182-184
 Lower Camden Street Hall, 123-127

Macbeth, 248, 249
 Mackay, Chalmers, 39, 52
 Maeterlinck, Maurice, 225
 Manchester, 198
 Martyn, Edward, 111, 112
 Masfield, John, 164
 Maskelyne, 183, 184
 Matthews, Bache, 286
 "Mechanics'" Theatre, The, 153, 155
 Molesworth Hall, 127, 128
 Montagu, C. E., 153, 156, 199
 Monteagle, Lord, 127-129
 Moore, George, 108, 111, 112, 114, 153, 183

 National Theatre Co., Ltd., 177-178, 229
 Navy and Army Canteen Board, 274-279

 New York, 239, 241-245, 267, 268
 Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 202
 Nic Shiubhlaigh, Maire, 118, 120, 121, 123, 129, 130, 146, 151, 152, 158 n., 185, 186
 Norman, Henry F., 123, 158 n.
 Nottingham Repertory Theatre, 279-284

On Baile's Strand, 164, 165
 Ormond Dramatic Company, 18, 25, 66-71, 102
 Oxford, 179-181
 O'Dempsey, Brigit (Mrs. W.G. Fay), 186, 190, 191, 208, 210, 248, 250
 O'Donovan, Father, 135
 O'Donovan, Fred, 156
 O'Grady, Standish, 110, 115
 O'Neill, Maire, 186, 208, 267
 O'Sullivan, Seumas, 123, 130, 149, 185

 Paris, 268, 269
 Payne, Ben Iden, 223-225, 227
 "Pepper's Ghost," 96, 97
 Pigott forgeries, the, 161
 Pirandello, 287
 Pitt-Hardacre, J., 53
 Play-actors, The, 263-265
 Playfair, Sir Nigel, 250
 Poel, William, 108, 248-251
 Pollock, Sir Frederick, 155

 "Q" Theatre, 285
Quality Street, 280
 Quinn, Maire T., 114, 119, 120, 121, 128, 129, 144, 145, 157, 246

 Randford, Maud. *See* Lacy.
 Rice, Elmer, 286

THE FAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE

- Riders to the Sea*, 153, 191
 Roberts, George, 123, 142, 143,
 158 n., 185
 Russell, G. W. See "Æ."
 Ryan, F., 118, 120, 125

 Scottish Community Drama
 Society, 291, 294, 295
 Scottish National Players, 294
Shadowy Waters, 151
 Shaw, George Bernard, 108,
 206, 251
 Sinclair, Arthur, 165, 166, 170,
 182, 185
 Sinn Fein, 105, 113
Spreading the News, 164, 172
 St. Andrews, 290, 291
 St. Louis International Exposi-
 tion, 156
 Starkey, James G., 158 n.
 Stone, —, 86 *et seq.*, 98
 Stopford Brooke, Dr., 155
 Symons, Arthur, 134
 Synge, J. M., 106, 136-141,
 148, 153, 156, 158 n., 166-
 169, 178, 183, 211-222

 Terry, Ellen, 253, 254, 271
The Adding Machine, 287
The Bias of the World, 265
The Building Fund, 173, 174, 245
The Canavans, 210
The Countess Cathleen, 111
The Country Dressmaker, 227
The Country Girl, 287, 288
The Dancers, 284
The Eloquent Dempsey, 188-190,
 191
The Gaol Gate, 205, 206
The Hour-glass, 129, 130, 132
The King's Threshold, 136, 143,
 156

The Land, 175
The Laying of the Foundations,
 125, 132
The Mineral Workers, 206
The O'Flynn, 252-255
The Playboy of the Western
 World, 211-220
The Racing Lug, 125
The Rising of the Moon, 222, 244
The Sleep of the King, 127
The Ugly Duchess, 290
The Unicorn from the Stars, 228
The Well of the Saints, 166-169,
 181, 183, 211
The White Cockade, 185
 Tree, Sir Herbert, 19, 251-255
 Tree, Viola, 284
Twenty-five, 129, 130, 132

 Ulster Literary Theatre, 192

 Vaughan, Ernest, 227, 231
 Vernon, Emma, 183, 185, 186

 Walker, Frank, 123, 130,
 158 n., 185
 Walkley, A. B., 133
 Wareing, Alfred, 197, 198, 200,
 203
 Whitbread, J. W., 39, 47, 60
 Wolverhampton, 292, 293
 Wright, Udolphus, 158 n., 178,
 182
 Wyndham, the Right Hon.
 George, 141, 142, 155

 Yeats, J. B., 150, 160-162, 164
 Yeats, W. B., 105, 108, 110,
 111, 118, 120, 123, 125, 129,
 130, 136, 143, 151, 157, 158
 and n., 162, 164, 178, 207-
 210, 219, 228, 235

